

**“When Are We Going To Be Settled Down and Know This Is Our Place?”: A
Phenomenological Exploration of Iraqi Refugee Families’ Lived Experiences
with Resettlement**

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Lisa Shari Silverman
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation the refugee families who welcomed me into their homes, openly shared their personal and heartfelt stories with me, and entrusted me to responsibly and accurately convey their lived experiences with resettlement in the United States using their voices. Without their willing participation, this research and subsequent dissertation would not have been possible, and to them I am eternally grateful.

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Abstract

Of the 69,930 refugees that resettled to the United States during the fiscal year of 2013, the largest group consisted of over 19,000 Iraqi refugees. Additionally, the recent outbreak of a new wave of violence in Iraq has led to an increase in the number of Iraqi citizens who have fled Iraq's borders and migrated to the United States. Earlier studies that had been conducted on the resettlement of Iraqi refugees were quantitative in nature, focused on individuals, and did not provided a nuanced and thick description of the lived experiences of refugee families who had resettled in the United States. This gap in the research is particularly relevant for Iraqi refugee families since they comprise such a large proportion of refugees migrating to America.

Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative existential phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of resettlement for Iraqi refugee families who had recently been forced to flee their homeland and resettle in a mid-sized southeastern city in the United States. From this study it is hoped that government and nonprofit agencies will have a clearer vision of what resettlement was like from the families' perspectives. Seven Iraqi refugee families (17 participants) were interviewed for the purpose of gaining multiple perspectives of the resettlement process from each family. After data analysis, the seven major themes that emerged across families from these unstructured in-depth interviews were: (1) "We came from death"/"A new life for me and my family" (leaving danger for safety), (2) "We left everything" (loss associated with trauma), (3) "Now we have hope"/"What future do we have?" (hope/lack of hope), (4) "Can we help you? Do you need anything?"/"The assistance for us as refugees is very little" (support/lack of support), (5) "We trust God with our life" (religion and spirituality), (6) "The family is our backbone" (family bonding), and (7) "What will the future look

like?”/”We came to the unknown” (fear and apprehension about the future). From these themes, a thematic structure that credibly represents these families lived experiences was presented. Finally, the implications for future research and practice were discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and General Information

“While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.” - Antonio Guterres, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, 2005- present

“The Iraq I know is gone forever and will never be back...I still love the people, love the culture, I would pay anything to go just one day. But I would not be able to ever go back and live there.” – Dayla Sarkees, Iraqi Refugee, 2013

“I had to leave...it was the hardest decision in my life. It’s not a t-shirt or a jacket I am changing—my whole life changed...I left my heart in Baghdad.” Taghreed, Iraqi refugee, 2013

Since 1886, the Statue of Liberty located in New York Harbor, has welcomed millions of immigrants to the United States from all over the world. They come with hopes of having better lives than the ones they left behind. The modern-day United States is a country built largely by individuals who left their homelands searching for independence, improved living conditions, and pursuit of financial prospects that they did not otherwise have access to in their countries of origin. Moreover, the United States has granted entry to more people from other countries for the purpose of resettlement and pursuit of the “American Dream” than any other country in the world (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011).

While many of these newcomers chose to leave their own countries voluntarily and resettle in a new homeland, a special group of immigrants, referred to as refugees, are not always able to determine their destination, the length of their displacement, and under what conditions they will live and struggle to survive (Cohon, 1981). Refugees are involuntary migrants who have been pushed from their homeland, fled political violence or extreme environmental

devastation, and many would probably prefer to return if safety permitted (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee as someone who,

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (UNHCR, 2010).

By 2008, 42 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of conflicts and natural disasters (UNHCR, 2009). Of those people, 26 million were classified as internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 15.2 million of them were classified as refugees (UNHCR, 2009). While UNHCR reports that less than 1% of all refugees eventually experience third country resettlement, the United States welcomes over half of these refugees, more than all other resettlement countries combined (U.S. Department of State, 2013a). From a local perspective, in 2013, over 1,600 refugees were resettled in Tennessee and 170 of those were in the city of the present study (Tennessee Office for Refugees, 2013).

Iraqi Refugee Demographics

Due to recent political and economic instability, poverty, natural disasters, and wars in countries with majority Muslim populations, the number of Muslim refugees around the world has increased significantly (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants [USCRI], 2010). Over 70% of the world's recent refugees are Muslim (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003). However, the experiences of forced migration from their homelands and resettlement in North America for

Muslim refugees have only recently begun to be described and understood in scholarly work. One country in which 97% of the population identifies as Muslim is Iraq (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). Iraq has had a 35 year history of conflict, during which many innocent citizens have endured extended political corruption, violence, and persecution. Such events included the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980's, the first U.S. invasion of Iraq due to the Iraqi-Kuwait war during "Desert Storm" in 1991, Saddam Hussein's reign and fall, politically imposed economic sanctions, and the second U.S. invasion of Iraq after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks in search of "weapons of mass destruction (WMD)" during "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in 2003. As a result of this on-going political unrest, Iraqis are the second largest refugee group under UNHCR's responsibility worldwide, with 1.9 million having sought refuge, mainly in countries bordering Iraq, such as Jordan and Syria (UNHCR, 2009).

History of Conflict in Iraq

The country of Iraq has been in a constant state of conflict for the past three decades, beginning with the war between Iraq and Iran in 1980, a period of time when the two countries struggled for power and control in the Middle East (Parasiliti, 2003). War and tension between Iraq and Iran initiated conflict-induced displacement of Iraqi citizens, circumstances which continue today as a result of subsequent conflicts. Rebellious uprisings between political and religious leaders have resulted in an atmosphere of continuous fighting and violence that has resulted in the deaths of many civilians and the continual displacement of Iraqis (Ghareeb, Ranard, & Tutunj, 2008).

In August of 1990 the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, a bordering country south of Iraq, prompted the United States to use military force against Iraq. The United States enacted a law to

use military force against Iraq in January of 1991 (PL 102-1), which was aimed to enforce the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait (Elsea & Grimmett, 2011). The result of this operation “Desert Storm” was the liberation of Kuwait and devastation of the Iraqi military within less than 6 weeks (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Years later, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, America once again exerted military force in Iraq. In October of 2002, the U.S. Congress approved the use of military force against Iraq (PL 107-243). This resolution was largely driven by suspicions that forces in Iraq were harboring WMD, such as biological, chemical, and nuclear agents, to be used for acts of terrorism (Dale, 2009). According to the resolution of 2002 (PL 107-243), members of Al Qaeda, a suspected organization purportedly associated with the September 11th terrorist attacks, were thought to be located in Iraq. Consequently, U.S. military operations began in March of 2003, as part of “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” to disassemble suspected organizations promoting terrorist activity (Dale, 2009). These claims of Iraqi possession of WMD subsequently turned out to be false and the threat to U.S. security was unfounded. The war lasted almost 9 years with the last group of troops leaving in December of 2011. However, although U.S. involvement has officially concluded, peace in Iraq remains precarious, political divisions remain, and the demand for Iraqi refugee resettlement continues to exist.

Iraqi Refugee Migration Pattern

In the past, the majority of Iraqi citizens have fled to neighboring countries, such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt (UNHCR, 2012a). However, more recently refugee resettlement out of Iraq has been complicated by Middle East uprisings and violence associated with the “Arab Uprising” phenomenon which began moving across the region in December of

2010. “Arab Uprising” is a protest movement sweeping across the Middle East that involves anti-government uprisings. The intent is to promote democracy and freedom from oppressive governments; however, the revolution is riddled with armed conflict and civil unrest. In 2011, Syria broke out into violent conflict, and as a result, its own population has been fleeing to nearby Lebanon and Jordan.

As of November 2011, over one million Iraqi refugees continued to reside in Syria (UNHCR, 2011a). Those Iraqis who sought refuge in Syria in the past are now in a perilous situation because what was once “safe” has now become a “danger zone.” However, returning to Iraq is not usually an option for refugees in Syria or other host countries, since many of the personal threats that provoked the original migration still exist. Most recently, in 2014 the Sunni fundamentalist extremist group referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) has instigated threatening violence through bombings and shootings in the central regions of the country in and around Baghdad. The uprising of this sectarian group has resulted in increasing number of murders, injuries, and displacement of Iraqi civilians. Therefore, many Iraqi refugees may now have to experience secondary migration to other host countries such as the United States in order to receive humanitarian support.

Additionally, Iraq must accommodate approximately 1.5 million IDPs (UNHCR, 2012b). As the country struggles to regain its structure in the aftermath of war, the future outlook for Iraq is uncertain. Consequently, the need for further resettlement assistance for Iraqi refugees is predicted to continue.

Scope of the Research Problem

Of the 69,930 refugees that resettled to the United States during the fiscal year of 2013, the largest resettling group consisted of over 19,000 Iraqi refugees (U.S. Department of State, 2013d). Furthermore, since February of 2007, when the U.S. federal government began the large-scale processing of Iraqi refugee applications based on humanitarian need, the United States has served as the host country for a total of 85,000 Iraqi refugees (U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, 2013). More locally, Iraqi refugees comprised the largest group of refugees to resettle in the city of the present study in 2013 (J. Cornwell, personal communication, March 17th, 2013).

It is apparent from the above data describing the number of Iraqi citizens who have been both displaced from their homes, and either remained within Iraq or fled Iraq, that the number of people affected has been quite substantial and continues to remain significant. Additionally, as a consequence of the current politically induced violence in the Middle Eastern region of the world, particularly in Syria, an increasingly large number of Iraqi refugees may opt to resettle in the United States. Therefore, it is imperative for resettlement agencies that assist these refugees to have a clearer understanding of the refugees' experiences so the agencies can design programs to best meet their needs.

Research on U.S. Resettlement of Refugees from Other Countries

Extensive empirical research exists that includes groups of refugees that migrated to the United States during the 1970's and 1980's largely from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. The majority of the studies conducted between 1980 and 2000 were focused on these populations (e.g., Fox, 1991; Nicassio, 1985, Vinokurov, Birman, & Edison, 2000; Weine et al., 1998; Westermeyer, Neider, Vang, 1984). Additionally, the majority of

research conducted with refugees focused on the implications of their past traumatic experiences in their homeland prior to fleeing, and the effects of subsequent living conditions upon resettlement on their individual mental and physical health (e.g., Cohon, 1981; Mghir, Freed, Raskin, & Katon, 1995; Miller & Rassmusen, 2010; Procter, 2005; Weinstein, Sarnoff, Gladstone, & Lipson, 2000; Williams & Westermeyer, 1986). More extensive exposure to violence, loss, and lack of safety and security have been found to be largely associated with more negative health outcomes for refugees (e.g., Ai, Peterson, & Ubelhor, 2002; Bhui et al., 2003; Jarranson et al., 2004; Keller et al., 2006).

An additional body of literature has focused on the acculturation process that refugees must undergo when they arrive in their new homeland and has examined the impact of acculturative stress (AS) on their ability to adjust and adapt once they arrive in their host country (e.g., Berry, 2005; Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988; Donà & Berry, 1994; Liebkind, 1996; Oh, Koeske, & Sales, 2002). Higher levels of AS have been found to be associated with lower levels of adaptation and functioning in the host country (e.g., Donà & Berry, 1994; Lin, 1986; Lin, Masuda, & Tazuma, 1979; Sundquist, Bayard-Burfield, Johansson, & Johansson, 2000; Westermeyer et al., 1984) and higher levels of psychological distress (Spasojević, Heffer, & Snyder, 2000; Westermeyer, Neider, & Callies, 1989). However, while there are a number of studies that have focused on the experiences of refugee families (Chambon, 1989; D'Avanzo, Frye, & Froman, 1994; Detzner, 1992; Fox, 1991; Meredith, Abbott, & Cramer, 1986; Simon, 1983; Williams, 1990), the great majority of studies have focused on describing the experiences of individual refugees rather than utilizing a lens through which to examine the family as the unit of analysis.

Research on the Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees

There are also numerous studies that have examined the experiences of Iraqi refugees who have migrated to other developed countries, such as the Netherlands, Great Britain and Australia, and which have focused on health outcomes and processes of acculturation as well (e.g., Al-Rasheed, 1992; Hosin, Moore, & Gaitanou, 2006; Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Schreuders, & De Jong, 2004; Mansouri, Leach, & Traies, 2006, Waxman, 2001). Less is known about Iraqi refugees who have resettled in the United States. While there are several studies examining Iraqi refugee resettlement experiences in the United States, most of them are of a quantitative nature, none of them utilize phenomenological methodology, and all of them have focused on the individual as the unit of analysis, rather than on the family and the family context (Davenport, 2013; Jamil et al., 2007; Jamil, Ventimiglia, Makki, & Arnetz, 2010; Kira et al., 2010; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Mollica, 2007; Takeda 2000).

Consequently, the limited previous research that has been conducted on the resettlement of Iraqi refugees may not have provided a nuanced and thick description of the lived experiences of refugee families who have resettled in the United States. This gap in the research is particularly relevant for Iraqi refugee families since they comprise such a large proportion of refugees migrating to America (U.S. Department of State, 2013d). By examining the lived experiences of Iraqi refugee families who have recently resettled to the United States, and in the southeastern region of the country more specifically, government and nonprofit agencies will have a clearer vision of what these experiences are like from the families' perspectives. As a result, these agencies will be better positioned to be of assistance by meeting the families "where they are" and not where the aid workers perceive them to be. Hopefully, they can develop

policies and implement interventions that will more readily ease the transition process for these refugee families in rebuilding their lives since these families are at risk for developing maladaptive coping strategies in response to the stress incurred by the enormous changes they have had to and will continue to encounter.

Purpose of the Study

Accordingly, the purpose of my phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of resettlement for Iraqi refugee families who were recently forced to flee their homeland and chose to migrate to the United States. This study involved interviewing two or three members from seven Iraqi refugee families to gain multiple perspectives on the resettlement process of each family. For the purposes of this research, resettlement was defined as leaving one's country of nationality or a bordering country for safety reasons and voluntarily choosing to permanently relocate and rebuild one's life in a host country.

Research Questions

Consequently, this study addressed the overarching research question "what are the lived experiences of resettlement for Iraqi refugee families in a mid-size southeastern U.S. city?"

Additional sub-questions that were addressed in this research study were:

- "What is the meaning of the resettlement transition for Iraqi refugee families?"
- "What are the lived experiences of Iraqi refugee families prior to resettlement?"
- "What are the lived experiences of Iraqi refugee families during resettlement?"

Research Methodology

Since there was a dearth of research examining the resettlement process for Iraqi refugee families in the United States, scholarly exploration was needed to provide the foundation for

improved programs to accommodate their needs. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring phenomena about which not a great deal is known and which researchers have not previously examined extensively (Creswell, 2013). Thus, my inquiry into the experiences of resettlement in a mid-size southeastern U.S. city for Iraqi refugee families was a situation in which qualitative approaches seemed to be applicable. Moreover, qualitative research is appropriate for answering questions such as “what is happening here?” or “what are the experiences of the participants?” (T. Paulus, personal communication, Jan 24th, 2013). I chose an existential phenomenological approach because it best fit the purpose of my research study and was best suited for collecting and analyzing data that would help me to capture the essence of these families’ lived experiences. This research approach enabled me to capture and to present the lived experiences of Iraqi refugee families who resettled in a mid-size southeastern U.S. city, in their own words. In addition, it permitted me to create a thematic structure that credibly represented their lived experiences.

Personal Stance and Bracketing of Phenomenon

I chose to pursue qualitative research and conduct a qualitative research study because my view of the world and of people’s experiences is that of a constructivist perspective, rather than a positivist one. In other words, with regard to my ontology, when considering human beings and their beliefs and experiences, I do not believe that one absolute answer to any given question exists, but instead that multiple truths or realities, which constitute varying viewpoints, depict an accurate representation of reality (Creswell, 2013). My perspective of how knowledge is acquired is analogous to looking through a transparent crystal from different angles and thus seeing different images depending on one’s vantage point. None of the images are incorrect.

They are just different and dependent on each facet and angle, which is analogous to a person's context and experiences. Consequently, qualitative researchers take these multiple perspectives into account, and attempt to represent a composite of the realities of participants with regard to any particular experience (Creswell, 2013). In addition, with regard to my epistemology, I do not take on an objectivist standpoint often adapted in quantitative research whereby "there is a separation between the knower and the known" (Daly, 2007, p. 23). Instead, I subscribe to the subjectivist standpoint of qualitative research, whereby it is not assumed that a researcher should strive to remove herself from the research process to avoid affecting the results (Piantanida & Garman, 2009), but rather that "all knowledge is constructed through a meaning-making process in the mind of the knower" (Daly, p. 23).

I pursued a study that explored the lived experience of Iraqi refugees for several reasons. First, as a result of my extensive personal experience with grief and loss, as well as through my course work, I discovered that I had a strong interest in working in an applied setting with individuals who have had experiences that have led to grief and loss. During the course of my studies during my doctoral program, I had the opportunity to explore the experiences of several refugee populations, including Iraqis, and I came to realize that these individuals had suffered an inordinate amount of loss. Consequently, I developed my passion for exploring and understanding the experiences of refugees who had undergone forced migration to the United States in order to be better equipped to assist them during their resettlement process.

Second, I chose to study Iraqi refugees because they were resettling in the United States in increasing numbers. Additionally, during the past year and a half, I had the pleasure of building a personal relationship with an Iraqi refugee family, as I was serving as their English

tutor. Not only was I personally moved by their plight to escape potential harm and persecution and to rebuild their lives successfully by resettling in the United States, but also through my relationship with them, I also learned quite a bit about Iraqi culture and history. I also made contact with numerous other Iraqi refugee families living locally and believe that their lived experiences were of great value both to me and to others who are dedicated to assisting these vulnerable families once they arrive in the United States.

Finally, I feel personally connected to the plight of refugees all over the world since I represent the second generation of my family to be born in the United States. My great grandparents and grandparents, who were all of the Jewish faith, left religiously oppressive conditions in Eastern Europe during the early 20th century where their safety was threatened. They traveled to America under harsh conditions and entered through Ellis Island with few material resources and rebuilt their lives in the New York metropolitan area from “the ground up.” Consequently, I have the utmost respect and admiration for present-day refugee families who are following similar paths in attempt to “start over” and rebuild their lives.

Summary of Stages of Migration for Refugees

The refugee migration experience can be conceptualized into three stages: pre-, trans-, and post-migration. Similar to McCubbin and Patterson’s (1982, 1983) Double ABCX Model of family stress, which incorporated the element of time to examine the families’ adaptation process to stressors, refugee families’ adaptations to their forced migration and subsequent resettlement needs to be viewed as a process that occurs over a period of time. This element of time is critical to understanding the experiences of refugee families’ resettlement during the post-migration

stage since their adaptation to their changing environment is substantially dependent on the experiences in the prior stages.

Pre-migration Stage

The pre-migration phase is often initiated as a result of civil war, political conflict, or military action, where citizens in certain regions of the world, due to persecution, can no longer rely on their own government to meet their basic needs for survival or offer them protection from bodily harm (UNHCR, 2010). Citizens endure these conditions and are often forced to make the choice to flee their home country to avoid the risk of bodily harm or death (Papadopoulos, 2002). They experience extensive loss on numerous levels - physically, contextually, and psychically. For example, refugees may lose include their home, friends and family, family structure and function, independence, homeland, cultural identity, health, as well as physical, economic, and emotional safety and security (Eisenbruch, 1988; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Papadopoulos, 2002). During the pre-migration period when refugees are continuing to live in their own country, conditions are often appalling. These conditions might include on-going food and water shortages, having their homes, businesses, and material possessions violently destroyed, or living under the constant threat of such deprivation and destruction. In addition, they may witness family and friends being tortured, sexually assaulted, or murdered, or be subject to such treatment themselves (Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vromans, & King, 2013).

During this stage of migration, it is important to note that individuals experience varying degrees of threats of harm or devastation to actual destruction of personal property or bodily injury described above. Also, the length of time that individuals and families are exposed to these conditions is highly variable and can range from weeks or months to years. However, the

extent of their loss and damages and the length of time they endured them will contribute to the choices they make in the subsequent stages.

The extent and frequency of their exposure to traumatic events such as assault, torture, murder, and other forms of human rights violations, may have negative effects on refugees' mental, physical, and emotional health. However, it is important to consider that refugees' individual abilities to cope with stress, their mental health status prior to the circumstances that forced them to flee, and their understanding of these circumstances may have a greater influence on how their exposure to traumatic events actually impacts them. Consequently, the specifics of the actual events may be less consequential than their perceptions of them. For example, Barber (2009) found that youth exposed to political violence in their home countries had better outcomes when they had a context for understanding the basis of the conflict and were prepared for it, rather than being "blind-sided" and unable to make sense of it.

In addition, the financial and educational resources that the refugees had prior to migration may affect how they adjust during resettlement. Consequently, if they have lost their financial assets as a result of the conflict, and are no longer able to gain employment in fields which they were previously educated and trained for, then these losses may impart additional stress for them in subsequent stages. Conversely, refugees who had fewer financial and educational resources in their homeland prior to the conflict may actually endure less stress upon resettlement as a result of the losses associated with such resources.

Trans-migration Stage

During the trans-migration phase, in desperate attempts to escape brutal treatment or the threat of such, displaced persons may flee across the border to a neighboring country and end up

residing in a refugee camp, or attempt to exist illegally under the constant threat of being arrested and forcibly returned to their home country. Alternatively, they may obtain temporary legal status in bordering countries that are willing to absorb them and offer them asylum in crowded sections of cities in which they congregate together (Ghareeb et al., 2008). During this period, families can often be fragmented and children separated from their parents. Conditions in refugee camps or sections of cities where refugees temporarily reside are often non-conducive to healthy physical, mental, and emotional development; these camps may suffer from severe overcrowding, shortages of medical care, food, and water, geographical confinement, and lack of educational and employment opportunities (Al-Khalidi & Tanner, 2007; Miller & Rasco, 2004). Refugees can spend from months to years in refugee camps awaiting the opportunity to apply for refugee status (Brough et al., 2013).

Again, the length of time that refugees are exposed to these conditions is extremely variable. During this stage, factors to be considered are the length of time the refugees have been displaced from their home, whether immediate family members were physically separated, and the conditions they were living under after they fled. For example, were the refugees living confined in refugee camps, in bordering countries with legal status, or illegally hiding in neighboring countries?

The longer the refugees have had to live in temporary shelter and have been unable to permanently resettle as legal citizens in a host country, and the worse their living conditions were during trans-migration, then the more difficulty they have adjusting to resettlement due to high levels of chronic stress (Laban et al., 2004; Mansouri et al., 2006). However, if immediate family members were able to flee as a unit, and children were not separated from their parents, then the

living conditions would be less of a factor than the fact that they had continuous familial support (Foster, Davies, & Steele, 2003; Wolff & Fesseha, 1999) and did not have to worry about the status of their loved ones or mourn losses of attachment relationships.

Post-Migration Stage

When the opportunity for application to migrate to a receiving country arises, refugees must decide between risking separation from family and friends and losing those connections, as opposed to the potential benefits of a better life in a country willing to offer them chance at a new beginning. In the United States, the President determines the number of refugees that will be offered admission, based on a needs assessment of the global political climate in a given year (USCRI, 2014). Additionally, once accepted for admission in the United States, unless refugees have family members who have previously resettled here, they have no control over in which city they will be placed. This placement process is politically and financially governed, whereby refugees are randomly placed in cities that have open slots in which to accommodate them (USCRI, 2014). If they do choose to leave and resettle, refugees' arrivals in a receiving country marks the beginning of the post-migration stage.

According to the UNHCR (2011b) provisions of resettlement should “provide a resettled refugee and her/his family and dependents with access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals” (p. 3). These provisions may seem generous and sufficient in this description. However, refugees often arrive in their host country with very few personal belongings and financial resources. Furthermore, they are only offered financial support from the government to assist them with their transition process and establish

themselves in their new “homeland” for the first several months after their arrival, before it is cut off, and they are expected to be self-sufficient (Harkins, 2012).

Once in their new country refugees often initially feel relieved about their physical safety. However, they are faced with multiple, sometimes unanticipated, challenges. These challenges include struggling to communicate and learning a new language, navigating government programs and school systems, fitting into an unfamiliar cultural context, dealing with marginalization by some native citizens, obtaining employment with a lack of appropriate vocational skills, and feelings, at times, of disillusionment and isolation (Harkins, 2012; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Mitschke, Mitschke, Slater, & Teboh, 2011). These challenges have the potential to create increased levels of stress for refugees to deal with which they may not have been prepared to face.

During this stage, factors that contribute to refugees’ levels of stress are the host community’s receptiveness to multiculturalism and the presence of an accepting established social support network consisting of individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds to resettled refugees (Williams & Berry, 1991). Depending on the cultural diversity of the host community, the general population may stereotype, harbor mistrust of, and discriminate against a particular group of refugees, which could be detrimental to their adjustment. However, if there is a community from the same country residing locally, as well as other refugees that have resettled in previous years, strong social support may be available to newly arrived refugees to counter the potential discrimination (Williams & Berry).

Additionally, during the post-migration stage, refugees may experience “cultural bereavement,” which Eisenbruch (1991) asserted is a normal, predictable, and constructive

process in response to devastatingly traumatic experiences that they were exposed to in their homeland. Cultural bereavement encompasses the meaning of the trauma for refugees, their cultural means for expressing their distress, and their cultural strategies for overcoming it. Signs and symptoms of cultural bereavement commonly displayed by refugees may resemble post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as defined by Western psychiatric standards (Eisenbruch, 1991). During this stage, they may hold distorted perceptions (Crittenden, 2006; George & Solomon, 2008) and fears based on past experiences that are no longer relevant to their current situation. As a result their stress reactivity may be increased, which can negatively impact their resettlement experience in the United States.

In addition, refugees' prior experiences with cultures and languages different from their own could make their transition easier. In general, increased exposure to American culture, English, and gender egalitarianism in schools and workplaces prior to migration and resettlement in the United States could assist them with their acculturation process, and serve to lower their stress during this period. Finally, refugees' abilities to successfully learn English, procure employment and affordable secure housing, and acclimate their children to school will enhance their ability to achieve self-sufficiency and independence.

The progression of the three stages of migration is not necessarily linear, whereby the factors in one stage may directly or indirectly influence the refugees' approaches to the next stage. Some factors may contribute more than others to the quality of resettlement experiences. Factors that will impact the forced migration experience for refugees may include: individual differences in attitudes toward and expectations of resettlement, the willingness and capacity to adapt to change, and the ability to cope effectively with stress. In sum, although refugees are at

risk for negative outcomes from numerous factors, many of these factors can be moderated or their impact moderated through thoughtfully designed preventative and interventional programs that target issues specific to refugees' experiences.

While the above section describes the stages of migration for refugees in general, an account of Iraqi refugees' lives in Iraq is warranted in order to comprehend the enormity of the adjustment required of them once they resettle in the United States. Therefore, the following sections present a review of Iraqi culture context, people, and day-to-day life for Iraqis, including descriptions of the dimensions that are most influential upon resettlement in a host country.

Cultural Context of Life in Iraq for Iraqi Refugees

Ongoing disorder in Iraq, escalating in 2003 with the U.S. invasion, has resulted in upheaval in the Iraqi culture and has disrupted the livelihoods of Iraqis as a whole. All aspects of life, however, have been affected by the ongoing conflict. As a consequence of the ongoing waves of violence, it has been estimated that from March 2003 through June 2006, 151,000 Iraqi civilians lost their lives (Iraq Family Health Survey Study Group, 2008). That number of civilian casualties is certainly now substantially higher since it is 9 years since that study was conducted. In addition, several million more Iraqis have been displaced from their homes as a result of the more recent conflict (Momani, 2013).

Religious and Ethnic Life

The Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] (2014) estimated that 97% of the Iraqi population practices the Islamic religion; 60-65% of those are Shia and 32-37% of those are Sunni. The remaining 3% of Iraqis identify as Christian or other (CIA, 2014). Those who are not Muslim may have experienced particularly violent persecution (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003). Recent

reports have indicated that the overall Christian population may have dropped by as much as 50% since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003, with many fleeing to Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon (CIA, 2014). Yet, acts of violence and cruelty are directed not only to non-Muslims. Those of the Islamic faith also may have experienced persecution related to extremist sectarian conflict as well. Details of this persecution are discussed in subsequent sections of this description of the cultural context of Iraqis.

With regard to ethnicity, 75-80% of the population in Iraq is Arab, while 15-20% is Kurdish, and the remaining 5% identify as Turkoman, Assyrian, or other (CIA, 2014). Arabic and Kurdish are the official national languages among the people in Iraq (CIA, 2014). Ethnic differences have also been the cause of the instigation of violence against and between various groups. When it becomes impossible for Iraqis of any faith or ethnicity to resist the oppression of religious, ethnic, and political violence, then forced migration to other areas such as countries that border Iraq or to the United States becomes a reasonable option for them (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Educational Life

While Iraq was previously known to have very high standards for their educational system, with ongoing political conflict and sectarian violence, the country's infrastructure has not been able to continue the standards by which it previously functioned (Ghareeb et al., 2008). The educational system has experienced a severe deterioration in quality since 2003, as well as a sharp decline in student attendance as a result of the threat of danger and fear of bodily harm occurring while attending school (Ihsangolu, 2007). Furthermore, many school systems have closed down due to an inability to provide safety and security for their students and instructors

(UNICEF, 2008). Additionally, some schools that have remained open are experiencing overcrowding as a result of an influx of displaced students (Ihsangolu, 2007). 220,000 of the half million displaced children were school-age and attempted to continue their education in the midst of their country's chaos in locations that were safer than the ones from where they fled (Ihsangolu, 2007). Finally, some of the schools that have remained structurally intact functioned as temporary shelters for family members who have been displaced from their homes due to violence and destruction (UNICEF, 2008).

Even though Iraq's educational system has suffered greatly as a result of the ongoing violence, Iraqi refugees that have resettled in the United States between 2007 and 2009 have higher levels of education than other refugees in general. For example, 88% of Iraqi refugees received some formal schooling prior to their entry into the United States, as opposed to 70% of refugees from other countries (USDHHS, 2011). Also, before entering the United States, 60% of Iraqi refugees had received a degree from a technical school, a university, or medical school, as compared to 51% of the general refugee population (USDHSS, 2011).

With regard to differences for educational opportunity by gender, compared with other Arab countries that place a much lower value on education for girls over boys, Iraq had a much more flexible attitude toward the education of girls and women (Ellis, 2008). However, the more recent wave of violence beginning in 2003 reversed that trend due to an increase in Muslim fundamentalist beliefs and practices (Ghareeb et al., 2008). More recently, the estimated illiteracy rate among Iraqi women was 24% which was more than double that of the 11% rate among men (Inter-Agency Information Analysis Unit, 2012). Moreover, one in three girls aged 12-14 was not currently enrolled in school, and one in 10 girls of that age had never attended

school. Traditional cultural and social factors often remained obstacles to improvements in girls' access to education. Encouragement of early marriage, women and girls' familial and domestic responsibilities, and parental objections had been identified as main reasons behind girls' lower rates of enrollment in school. However, the major reasons for not attending school reported by young illiterate men were finances, too far a physical distance, and conflict with work. These cultural and social factors also played out in the gender differences observed in the economic lives of Iraqi men and women as well (Inter-Agency Information Analysis Unit, 2012).

Economic Life

Not only has ongoing violence affected Iraqi citizens' educational experiences, but their lives economically have been impacted as well. In terms of social capital, prior to the ongoing war and violence, Iraq was one of the richest of the Arab countries (Ihsanglu, 2007). It had been consistently characterized by a high level of literacy and numerous college educated citizens who worked as professionals. However, more recently, due to the on-going political conflict, this wealth of social capital has been greatly reduced. Numerous Iraqis held prominent positions as professionals, such as teachers, physicians, attorneys, and business executives, with distinguished careers and were considered to have middle and upper SES prior to resettlement. However, 40% of these professionals have been killed or have fled from Iraq due to war (Ihsanoglu, 2007). This loss of social capital does not only apply to men in Iraq. According to Ihsangolu (2007), the increased numbers of women who had achieved a high level of literacy, and who were working in many professional positions along with men, also have been severely reduced. This reduction was also impacted by their fear at times of going "out into the street" and suffering bodily harm when attempting to continue to maintain their presence in the work place.

Prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003, Iraq had evolved a more accepting attitude toward women holding professional positions in the workplace compared to other Arab countries, especially for those living in urban centers such as Baghdad (Ellis, 2008; Ghareeb et al., 2008). Yet, since that time as fundamentalist attitudes have become more prevalent and accepted in their society, professional opportunities for women to work outside the home have decreased and become less acceptable. However, in more traditional Iraqi families, particularly in the rural areas of the country, Iraqi men had been the primary income providers through fulfilling the role of financially supporting their families by working outside the home while their wives typically did not work outside the home (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003). In these families, women took primary responsibility for caring for the family with regard to household chores, cooking, cleaning, and childcare. In Islamic families, women often have believed that they were fulfilling their primary destiny and responsibility by serving their families (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Nonetheless, in these rural families Iraqi women may have been forced by circumstances to attempt to find work outside of the home to help sustain their families financially.

This shift in roles may have become necessary if her husband had been killed or if the couple became separated as a result of political violence prior to resettlement. In these cases, women may have involuntarily become the sole provider for their children and family. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iraq (2011), over one million Iraqi women had to take over as head of household as a result of their husbands' death or disappearance. This number constitutes one in nine Iraqi households headed by a woman and nine out of 10 of these women were widows (Inter-Agency Information Analysis Unit, 2012). These women struggled to find employment and experienced enormous economic difficulties in

providing food and shelter for all the members of their family due to their lack of extensive formal education and work experience. While these women received a very limited amount of money from the government, they predominantly relied on work they could do in their homes such as making bread or sewing clothing and selling it for income.

Social Life

In Iraqi culture, family has been highly valued and considered as the “center of life” (Ghareeb et al., 2008, p. 13). Early marriage was expected and encouraged and in traditional Iraqi families marriages were often arranged by the parents and sometimes occur between first cousins. A traditional Iraqi family was composed of a man who was the head of the household, his wife, and their children. The average number of children born per woman was 3.5 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2013). In Arab societies generally, children are highly valued. Children learned cultural values by observing and participating in family rituals and traditions. Since Iraq is traditionally a patriarchal society, a married woman becomes part of her husband’s family and extended family members, such as the husband’s parents and spouses of male children, will often live in the household as well (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Preservation of social bonds with relatives and friends was difficult during times of forced migration when separation during trans-migration and resettlement occurred. It is difficult to estimate the number of families that were separated as Iraqis fled from environments overwrought with conflict. Family members lost contact in their haste to find refuge and safety; therefore, many Iraqis continue to be uncertain about the fate of their loved ones. Al Ethawi (2013), who worked with ICRC, indicated he received an average of 20-30 requests per day from Iraqi families seeking to reunite with family members. This type of stressor is precisely what

Boss (2002) described as creating high levels of BA (boundary ambiguity) for such refugee families and would create ambiguous loss (see following section on theoretical perspectives). Disconnection from the social support of family and friends may become a source of stress for refugee families and impede their ability to successfully adapt (Maloof & Ross-Sheriff, 2003). An unfortunate outcome is social isolation that may be detrimental to emotional well-being.

Alternatively, social isolation can become a means of self-preservation. After years of political and sectarian discord, a time when government surveillance of activities was common and neighbors spied upon neighbors, many Iraqis have learned that it is safer to keep to themselves and not trust anyone outside of their immediate families (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Thus, when they migrate and settle in new homelands, for some their inclination is to isolate themselves, not knowing whom to trust. This pattern of secrecy as a means of self-preservation complicates resettlement, and may inhibit integration into their new communities.

The People of Iraq

This section includes a more specific ethnographic description of Iraqi people and their day-to-day life in Iraq and includes information that is most relevant for Americans to know in order to better understand who Iraqi people are on the whole. This information is partially drawn from material presented by Middle Eastern and Iraqi scholars and natives in order to educate U.S. government and refugee resettlement workers and provide them with an understanding of the experiences of Iraqi people and their lives prior to resettlement in the United States (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Moreover, some of the information is drawn from a book describing Iraqi refugee families' accounts of their flight from Iraq due to the sectarian violence, who were living in Jordan in the fall of 2007, as well as important aspects of their political and historical context

(Ellis, 2008). Furthermore, additional background information comes from a scholarly work that presented a survey of Arab culture in general, and also presented data by country (Nydell, 2006). Finally, this section is also supplemented by material acquired during an informational interview I conducted with the husband of the Iraqi refugee family to whom I teach English (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). He possesses a BA degree in journalism from an Iraqi university, a master's degree in Iraqi history from an Iraqi university, and was in the process of earning a master's degree in journalism at a university in Lebanon while his family remained in Iraq. He was not able to complete this degree since he and his family were accepted by and offered entry into the United States for resettlement and they thus left Iraq. Moreover, he was employed as a prominent journalist in Iraq before he left, so he is extremely knowledgeable about and had a broad perspective of Iraqi people and life in his native country.

History. The people of Iraq have one of the most ancient human civilizations in the world. Dating back nearly 10,000 years, Iraqi people, for example, were the first to operate as a democracy, to develop a writing system that is the source of the Roman alphabet, to develop planting and irrigation systems as a means to produce food, to begin the study of mathematics and astronomy, and to invent the wheel (Ghareeb et al., 2008). The Iraqi people of thousands and hundreds of years ago valued progress, and helping and caring for each other. However more recently, during the past thirty five years, and more intensely since 2003 when the United States invaded Iraq for the second time, people are “living just trying to get by” and “all they care about is staying alive” (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). Prior to these more recent times, Iraqi people lived together more harmoniously where people of all different denominations, ethnicities and religions were more integrated (Nydell, 2006). However, now

different groups live in a much more segregated and divided society which has been connected to sectarian conflict related to differences in religious denominations, ethnicity, and fundamental beliefs (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Nydell). While there are countless ethnic groups and varying religious sects in Iraq, three distinct groups occupy the majority of the country and will be the focus of this discussion.

Northern Kurdish region. The northern section of Iraq is the Kurdish region, which is where most Kurds reside. This section, in addition to Eastern Turkey, is designated as Kurdistan. The term Kurdish refers to this group's ethnicity. They are of Indo-European descent, speak Kurdish, and most practice Islam. The majority of Kurds practice Sunni Islam (Ghareeb et al., 2008). A discussion of the differences between the two major branches of Islam in Iraq, Sunni and Shia, will follow below. This Kurdish region of Iraq successfully operates independently of the rest of the country with a separate government and military that are Kurdish. The Kurdish people reside peacefully for the most part and are loyal to and protective of their region of safety. The resentment towards the Kurds by the Iraqi Arabs is rooted in a long standing dispute over the land they currently occupy and have designated as their own. Their Kurdish ethnicity is the common bond that unites them even while they practice different religious faiths (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Central Sunni region. The central section of Iraq, including the capital of Baghdad, is where the majority of Sunnis reside. Sunnis are of Arab descent, speak Arabic, and practice Sunni Islam. Sunnis comprise the minority Arab group in Iraq and there is a vast variation in levels of religious observance among Sunnis (Ghareeb et al., 2008). These differences within this group and between this group and others have been the primary source of conflict and violence

in the central region of Iraq. Most recently, the minority fundamentalist Sunni group, ISIS, whose beliefs are strict and extreme, believe that all people should live according to the ways of life of 1,500 years ago in the times that their prophet Muhammad lived (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). This group's goal is to gain power and force others to believe and to live as they do.

Not only is ISIS not willing to update and revise their beliefs and life styles to fit more modern times as more liberal Sunni's have done, they have also carried out extensive acts of violence and terror against innocent Iraqi civilians of all sects and groups not aligned with their beliefs. This situation has perpetuated the already existing presence of sectarian violence which occurs predominantly in this central region. Moreover, the Iraqi government and military have an extremely weak infrastructure, particularly in this region of the country, so they have not been successful at reducing or controlling the level of conflict, at offering protection to the victims of such targeted violence much less rebuilding the country due to the destruction resulting from such violent attacks (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014, Nydell, 2006).

Southern Shiite region. The southern region of Iraq is inhabited by mostly Shias. Shias are of Arab descent, speak Arabic, and practice Shiite Islam (Ghareeb et al., 2008). While this region is approximately 80% Shia, Shias and Sunnis are generally able to peacefully coexist in this southern region of the country as opposed to the opposition and disharmony that occurs in central Iraq because the fundamentalist Sunnis do not have a strong hold in the south. Sunnis in the southern region tend toward less restrictive policies and observances. For example, in this region, Sunni and Shiite men and women intermarry (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014, Nydell, 2006).

Sunnis and Shias. The differences between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims lie in their differing ways of prayer and religious doctrines. Both groups share the same five pillars or basic teachings of Islam including (1) the declaration of faith in God, (2) fasting during the 9th month of the year in observance of Ramadan, (3) the giving of alms, (4) making a pilgrimage to Mecca or other holy place, and (5) praying daily (Nydell, 2006). However, Sunnis pray five times a day as opposed to three times a day for Shias (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

From a more fundamental perspective, the origin of the split and subsequent conflict between the two groups dates back to the 7th century and originated over the belief in the rightful successor to their Islamic prophet, Muhammad (Nydell, 2006). Shias believe that the prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali was appointed by Muhammad prior to his death and is Muhammad's rightful successor. Thusly, they revere him. Ali's son Hoessien fought and died in the Battle of Karbala in the name of Ali and so Shias mark his death with the observance of the mourning festival of Ashoura. They believed that only family members of Muhammad were qualified to the ruler of Islam. This early history has prompted Shiite Muslims to traditionally cherish values of justice and resistance to oppression and is felt day-to-day out of respect for Hossein. Shias also summon the power of saints when in need of assistance, and make pilgrimages to Shiite shrines in cities like Damascus, Najaf and Masshad (Comparison of Sunni and Shia Islam, 2013).

On the other hand, Sunnis disagree with Shias' beliefs in and fixation with Islamic religious figures beside the Prophet Muhammad. They do not agree with Shias that Ali was the rightful successor to the prophet Muhammad. They believe that Muhammad did not specifically appoint anyone to take his place before his death, but instead that a group of his most prominent companions gathered and elected Abu Bakr, Muhammad's close friend and father-in-law, as the

first caliph (ruler) of Islam. Therefore, Sunnis believed that anyone who was close to Muhammad and who was deemed qualified by the majority of the community is qualified to be the ruler of Islam. Also, Sunnis only consider Mecca as the designated place for their religious pilgrimages (Comparison of Sunni and Shia Islam, 2013).

Another significant difference between the two factions of Islam is that Shias are allowed to choose which clerics they wish to "follow" depending on the views of the particular cleric. Shiite clerics are permitted to issue pioneering religious rulings around controversial, modern practices in order to accommodate changes in lifestyle due to progress in society, science, and technology. In contrast, Sunni clerics are more concerned with scholarly agreement around new interpretation of the laws and principles in the Koran, the holy book of Islam. They exercise less flexibility around such and that has resulted in little progress or updated rulings on acceptance of modern advances such as stem cell research or assisted reproduction for followers of Sunni Islam (Comparison of Sunni and Shia Islam, 2013).

Diversity within and among groups. The northern and southern sections of the country are more rural and remote, whereas the central region, including Bagdad, is a more densely populated and urban setting (Ghareeb et al., 2008; N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). These differences in environmental settings between the regions may partially explain the differences in how successfully the groups are able to coexist and tolerate differences. Another factor is the variation in the degree of extremist beliefs within each group. The more strictly observant and the more rigid members of a particular group are, the less tolerant they are of differences among members of their own group or those of groups with differing beliefs. One factor that contributes to these differences in tolerance is Iraqis' levels of education. Generally,

Iraqis with higher levels of education are more flexible and more accepting of people with differing beliefs than their own, while those with less education are more closed to accepting differences in people's beliefs and background (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Nydell, 2006).

Gender roles. With regard to differences in gender roles among Iraqis, in addition to differences that were discussed in the previous section, many Iraqi Arab Islam women cover their hair and neck by wearing a *Hejab* (headscarf) when in public (Nydell, 2006). Additionally older, more traditionally observant women and those who are less educated or from rural areas may also wear long cloak clothes called *abaya* that cover their body from neck to ankle in public. On the other hand, Iraqi men generally wear western clothing (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Interestingly, many westerners consider the Islamic practice of Iraqi women covering their heads and or bodies in public, as Iraqi men's attempts at being restrictive, controlling, and disrespectful of women. However, Iraqis actually follow this practice because they highly value and respect women and hold them in such high regard that they do not believe that women's heads and or bodies should be taken for granted and viewed by men other than their husbands (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Nydell, 2006). Again, as mentioned previously, prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 progress had been made in the strict separation of traditional gender roles. However, since that time an increase in Muslim fundamentalist practices and beliefs has reversed that trend (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Nydell, 2006).

The Day-to-Day Life of Iraqi People

Geographic environment. The day-to-day life of people in Iraq is challenging and difficult, particularly when compared to that in the United States for multiple reasons. First, Iraqis must contend with extreme environmental weather conditions. The majority of Iraq

(central and southern region) is geographically located in desert conditions which mean that citizens endure 8 months of the year in temperatures above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. This excessive heat makes working and going to school every day physically demanding (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Environmentally, people also have to contend with high levels of dust in the air (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). The northern Kurdish region of the country, bordered by Turkey, is more mountainous with cooler temperature and excessive amounts of precipitation in the form of rain and snow in the higher elevations (Ghareeb et al., 2008).

Cost of living. Additionally, Iraqis face numerous other issues that may cause them concern in their day-to-day existence. For example, the cost of basic needs and services has become prohibitively expensive for many people (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Nydell, 2006). Consequently, in order to be able to earn enough to afford to meet their needs, the head of household, which is generally the husband in the family, must work an excess of an average of 60 hours a week (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). Working this many hours per week detracts from one's ability to spend extensive quality time with family and friends. This makes it difficult for the person and his or her family to maintain a high quality of life since social interaction with and expression of hospitality toward family, neighbors, and friends is so highly valued in Iraqi society.

Family. Iraqi collectivist culture values this extended network of community much more than that in the individualistic United States so the loss of it due to work commitments greatly affects the quality of Iraqis' day-to-day lives. Iraqi society is a more collectivist culture. Consequently, Iraqis place a greater value on the extended family including adult parents, in-laws, and adult children and their spouses than families do in the United States in which the

nuclear family is more highly valued over the extended family (Ghareeb et al., 2008). This shift in emphasis on nuclear family versus extended family has the potential to impart additional stress on Iraqi refugee families upon their arrival to this country.

Government infrastructure. Even if Iraqis were able to earn enough income to afford basic needs such as housing, utilities, food, water, clothing, and health care, access to such things has been limited due a lack of infrastructure that supports a consistent supply of such necessities (Ghareeb et al., 2008; Nydell, 2006). In addition, governmental agencies and services in Iraq have been difficult to access by citizens due to inefficiency and corruption within government agencies. It can take multiple visits over days, weeks, or months to successfully carry out even routine transactions (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). Moreover, many Iraqis worry about the lack of adequate education and healthcare available to their children, as well as their children's future potential due to the adverse conditions in their country. Since Iraqi people place much emphasis on raising their children to adopt the values and beliefs by which they live, it is of utmost importance to them that they are able to provide an atmosphere that is nurturing and safe while meeting their needs (Ellis, 2008).

Personal safety. Not only must Iraqis cope with struggling to get their own and their families' basic needs met, they also are constantly concerned about their own and their families' welfare and personal safety. Due to lack of loyalty, monetary incentives, and infrastructure, law enforcement personnel and military troops are ineffective in controlling violence against civilians (Ellis, 2008). While Iraqis may not have the freedom to move about throughout the country at will without being stopped at check points and asked to show papers to authorities, Iraqi civilians still have not received consistent and adequate protection from harm's way (N.

Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). For example, Iraqi parents worry about the safety of their children when they go off to school in the morning. They cannot be confident that their children will return home safely at the end of the day without witnessing violence, being physically harmed, or kidnapped. The reverse is true about children's concern for the safety of their parents when they leave home to go to work each morning (Ellis, 2008).

Tragedy and loss. As a result of the extended violence that Iraqi citizens have had to endure in their homeland, as a group they have been forced to cope and deal with extensive experiences with tragedy and loss. One source of strength that Iraqis rely on is their strong sense of faith and spirituality, regardless of whether they are Muslim, Christian, or another religion, Iraqis find solace in and make meaning of their potentially painful experiences through their strong commitment to their religious faith and the deity they worship (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007).

While little has been documented about how Iraqi refugees in particular cope with loss and tragedy, common shared experiences have been documented among refugees in general. Initially, during the pre- and trans-migration stages, refugees experience a loss of their bodily and personal safety and security due to the violence, upheaval, and instability that is occurring in their homeland and potentially in their temporary shelter of a refugee camp or living with illegal status in a bordering country. During this period their minimal needs, including a safe and nurturing environment that fosters healthy development in adults and children may not be consistently met. Once refugees resettle in their new permanent homeland, they initially have experienced a sense of safety, security, and relief because their lives and those of their immediate family members who migrated and resettled with them are no longer in imminent and immediate

threat of danger and their basic survival needs are now being met (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Weine et al., 1998; Westermeyer et al., 1984).

Through weeks, months, or even years after resettlement, the focus of their losses shift from immediate concerns about their own personal safety to the loss of their “everyday lives”. Refugees come to realize the loss of their “average expectable environment” (Hartmann, 1939) to which they had become accustomed during their life in their homeland prior to the conflict that caused their flight, including their culture’s societal norms (Fox, 1991; Fox, Baldwin, Rossetti, Plonczynski, & Bandagi, 2008). At this point refugees also acknowledge and more profoundly feel the loss of family and friends left behind and whose conditions or whereabouts may remain unknown to them (Fox, 1991; Fox et al., 2008; Meredith et al., 1986).

Summary

While the above summary attempts to paint a broad and generalized description of the past and current state of life in Iraq and does not address the nuances of within group variation, the situation for the Iraqi people and country on a whole is complex, ever evolving, and challenging to completely describe. Prior to 2003, while there were many conflicts and difficulties in Iraq, under the regime of Saddam Hussein’s oppressive rule Iraq’s borders were tightly controlled and the groups that instigated sectarianism and violence against other groups were removed from the country and not allowed to reenter (T. Fosberry, personal communication, August, 12th, 2014). Even though Saddam’s rule was that of a dictatorship and brutal by American standards, there were some Iraqi citizens that considered his reign to impart a positive influence on the quality of life in Iraq.

In the years following 2003, however, the situation in Iraq was exacerbated by the United States' military intervention which disposed Saddam Hussein from power. At this time, the United States unsuccessfully attempted to impose its version of democracy on the Iraqi government. Consequently, the delicate balance and equilibrium achieved among the various groups prior to this point was disrupted and a more vulnerable situation was created (T. Fosberry, personal communication, August, 12th, 2014, N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). As a result, the country's boundaries were no longer secured and the groups that had been barred from Iraq previously were then allowed to reenter and develop a toehold. The infrastructure and control that had been established up to this point was no longer in place and a new context of chaos, instability, and violence, much of which had been held at bay under Saddam's domineering and harsh ruling, was now being imparted on the day-to-day lives of the Iraqi people (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014).

In general, life for Iraqis has become far more difficult from an economic, physical, social, and emotional perspective since 2003. The authoritarian style laws, structure, and order that were established by Saddam's regime which allowed Iraqi society to be relatively productive, predictable, and stable, when removed in the years following 2003, created havoc for the Iraqi people. Employment and educational opportunities decreased for men and women and the more progressive attitudes toward women and their roles in society were set back (Nydell, 2006). The decrease in these opportunities has made it increasingly more difficult for them to adequately financially provide for and support themselves and their families. Moreover, Iraqis had to contend with an increased and persistent concern over their personal safety and that of their family due to the escalating violence. As a result, not only has their physical well-being

been affected, but also their social and emotional well-being as well due to the increased anxiety, fear, and mistrust they have lived with day in and day out.

Overall, according to Naji (personal communication, June 11th, 2014), most Iraqis have been peaceful, loving people by nature and many do not want to be living amongst the sectarian violence and bloodshed that they have had to endure over the recent several decades. As a community, Iraqis place great importance on inclusivity, cohesiveness, loyalty, and kindness. Unfortunately, the more recent fundamentalist and extremist members of certain groups have bred mistrust and misunderstanding among different groups. Consequently, the past and most recent wave of sectarian violence in June of 2014 has caused an increasingly large number of Iraqi citizens, who may feel extremely devoted and strongly attached to their homeland, to flee from their homes for their safety, their lives, and those of their families (N. Naji, personal communication, June 11th, 2014). As a result, the number of Iraqi citizens who are being forced to leave Iraq and ultimately will be destined to adopt refugee status will certainly be on the rise in the near future.

Theoretical Perspectives

According to family systems theory (Whitechurch & Constantine, 1993), a family is more than the sum of its individual parts. As family members experience stress or the pressure to change, the family system also experiences the pressure to change. However, the adaptation of a family under stress is undoubtedly partially dependent on the responses of individual family members. Consequently, with regard to a family's ability to manage stress effectively, individual family members' stress levels and the extent to which they can manage stress effectively contribute to the overall functioning of the entire family unit. When considering the theoretical

anchor points for the present study, two perspectives that are particularly relevant in accounting for the nature of stress experienced by **individual** refugees are Hobfoll's (1989, 2001) Conservation of Resource (COR) Stress theory and Williams and Berry's (1991) Acculturative Stress (AS) model. These two perspectives significantly contribute to the understanding of differences in experiences with resettlement among individual refugees which in turn contributes to the overall experience of the refugee family.

However, in terms of a model that accounts for the differences in refugee families' resettlement experiences, the Contextual Model of Family Stress (Boss, 2002) is extremely relevant. It recognizes that both internal and external family contexts during stress greatly influence a family's perception of the stressful situation, and thus their ability to manage the relevant stress they face. For the present study, this model allows for multiple perspectives on the experience of resettlement described by Iraqi refugee families while incorporating the numerous contexts in which these experiences occur.

Conservation of Resources Stress Theory

With regard to the refugee resettlement experience, particularly during the trans- and post- migration periods, Hobfoll's (1989, 2001) COR stress theory has been utilized to explain the variation among individual refugee's stress levels and ultimate outcomes. The basic tenet of this theory is that "individuals strive to obtain, retain, protect, and foster things that they value" (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 341). COR theory sees the key component of the stress process as resource loss. Resources can be considered as material, social, or emotional, and the degree of individual loss of such resources can impact a refugee's ability to cope with the losses that are associated with forced migration and the stress experienced as a result of these losses as described above.

According to the COR theory, resources include objects (e.g., homes, clothes, food), personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem), conditions (e.g., being married or living with someone provides social support, more financial security), and energies (e.g., time, money, and knowledge). Psychological stress can arise in three situations: (1) where individuals face a threat of resource loss, (2) where resources are actually lost, or (3) where an investment of resources fails to produce an expected return (Hobfoll, 2001). Moreover, Hobfoll argued that most resources are objectively determined, and placed greater emphasis on the shared versus individual nature of stress appraisals such that “resource loss for one individual would in most cases be perceived as loss by others in similar circumstances” (2001, p 342).

Hobfoll (1991) extended his COR stress theory to the condition of traumatic stress which is seen as especially threatening to resources and results in the rapid reduction of resources when it occurs. The rapidity of resource loss is related to the fact that traumatic stressors (1) often assault people’s basic values, (2) often occur unpredictably, (3) impart excessive burdens (4) cannot be addressed with previously developed strategies, and (5) evoke powerful mental images associated with an event. As a result, an individual or group may not be initially equipped to cope with such extreme demands, so their resources become exhausted rapidly in responding to the effects of the stressor. However, some resources, such as social support, may be left intact regardless of the traumatic stressor which will assist in recovery from it (Hobfoll, 1991).

These personal, social, or material resources tend to develop and exist in what COR theory calls ‘resource caravans’ and they do not exist in isolation (Hobfoll, 2014). Resource caravans are encouraged, discouraged, or outright prevented by environmental conditions that are called ‘resource caravan passageways’ (Hobfoll, 2014). Because resource caravans are

generated and maintained within the environmental and social context of resource caravan passageways, environmental context is essential to traumatic stress response. Hobfoll (2014) asserts that resource loss and the maintaining of resource caravans are the best predictors of traumatic stress response. Moreover, trauma responses follow cultural patterns because environmental conditions that create, sustain, or inhibit resource acquisition are culturally embedded.

These concepts are particularly relevant to refugees' forced migration experiences particularly because they are often leaving their culture behind for one that is very different from the one in which they are resettling. In addition, the extent of resource loss or the maintenance of resource caravans experienced by individual refugees can affect the stress perceived and experienced by their family members. Consequently, it is important to assess the extent of resources lost or retained by individuals in order to fully describe the impact on their entire family.

Acculturative Stress Model

When refugees resettle in a new country their experience with the acculturation process will vary greatly from individual to individual in families, as well as across families.

Acculturation refers to "the changes that groups and individuals undergo when they come into contact with another culture" (Williams & Berry, 1991, p. 633). Thus, acculturative stress (AS) is the stress experienced by individuals who resettle in a host country where the culture, language, and religious practices are very different from those in their home country, and thus require many changes in order to adapt. From this perspective, AS has been proposed to

influence the variable mental health outcomes that are observed among refugees (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987) and is related to one's ability to successfully adapt to a new situation.

Williams and Berry (1991) presented a model describing refugee experiences with AS. According to this AS model (Figure 1), the disparity in effects on individual refugees is dependent on a number of group and individual factors that enter into the acculturation process (Williams & Berry, 1991). One factor is the degree to which an individual experiences and participates in the acculturation process. A second factor is the stressors that may result from this varying experience of acculturation. For some, they may be negative and for some they may be neutral or positive. Finally, varying levels of AS may manifest as a result of the acculturation experience and stressors.

The relationship between these constructs is based on probability and the associations depend upon a number of moderating factors. Some influential factors include the nature of the host country, the type of acculturating group, and the demographic and psychological characteristics of the group and individual members (Williams & Berry, 1991). In particular, one's perceptions of the acculturation experience and one's coping skills can affect the level of AS experienced. Another important factor in resultant stress levels is the mode of acculturation (Berry, 1984). Those who feel marginalized tend to be highly stressed, and those who seek to remain separate tend to be highly stressed. Contrarily, those who pursue integration are more minimally stressed, and assimilation leads to intermediate levels of stress (Berry et al., 1987).

Figure 1
Model of Acculturative Stress

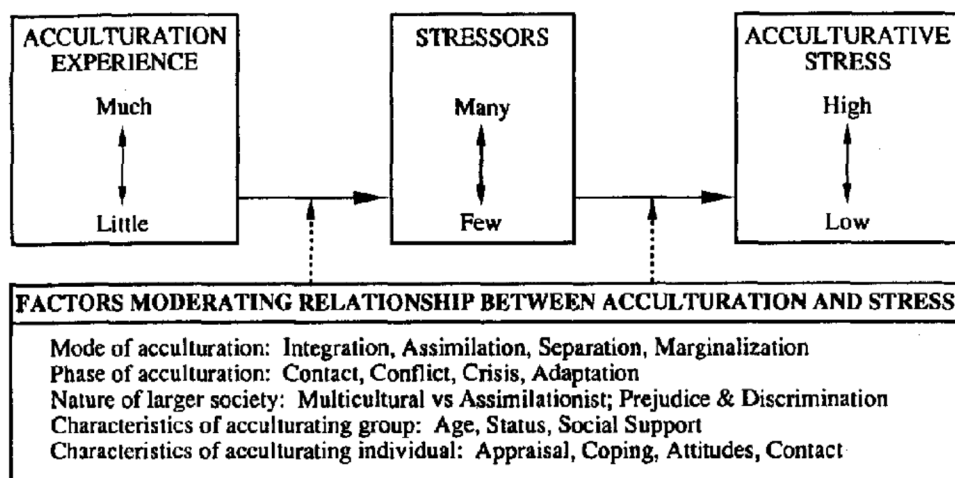


Figure 1. Model of Acculturative Stress (Williams & Berry, 1991)

Additionally, the general extent of openness with which the host society demonstrates its tolerance for cultural diversity contributes to the AS level (Williams & Berry, 1991). Moreover, many social and cultural qualities affect the degree to which AS is experienced, such as differences between SES, opportunities for social support, and the acceptance of the particular acculturating group into the society. Finally, factors related to pre-encounter experiences such as prior psychological state, prior exposure to the new culture or knowledge of the language, and attitude toward acculturation can influence the degree of AS (Williams & Berry, 1991). Despite which specific factors specifically contribute to a refugee's AS, the extent that an individual experiences AS may not only impact the quality of his or her resettlement experience, but also that of his or her entire family.

Contextual Model of Family Stress

While the extent of the COR and AS experienced by a refugee generally impacts his or her adjustment to resettlement on an individual level, it in turn contributes to a family's ability to manage with the stress of their resettlement process collectively as well. Consequently, variations in individual refugees' adjustments contribute to the degree of stress that the family experiences upon its resettlement. The more stress each family member perceives, the more stress the family as a whole will experience (Boss, 2002). Boss (2002) defined family stress as "pressure or tension in the family system – a disturbance in the steady state of the family" (p. 16).

Family stress versus crisis. Additionally, not only do refugee families deal with stress, but in some cases they may also be faced with crisis as well. According to Boss (2002), there is a definite distinction between stress and crisis. Stress is a disturbance in the equilibrium or steady state functioning of the family and exists in degrees on a spectrum from mild to severe. While stress can be viewed as an agent of change, rather than as inherently negative, stressors that occur over an extended period of time result in the formation of chronic or cumulative stress. This process is particularly relevant for refugee families since their transitions through the stages of migration have the potential to create multiple stressors for these families over a potentially lengthy, but indeterminate period of time. Boss (2002) classified stressors according to four different descriptors: (1) source, (2) type, (3) duration, and (4) density. According to Boss (1999), the most difficult type of stressors for families to manage were those labeled as "ambiguous stressor events" because their occurrence or severity was not clearly defined, and thus one cannot be certain of when or if it will occur. Refugee families frequently contend with

ambiguous stressors due to separation from or loss of homeland, family, and friends for uncertain periods of time, and are often unable to access details regarding the condition or whereabouts of such.

Conversely, Boss (2002) asserted that a crisis was an acute disturbance in the equilibrium of the family which dichotomously either occurs or does not, without any middle ground. Moreover, a crisis creates immobilization in a family system which ceases to function and stress management comes to a halt. According to Boss (1988), a crisis does not have to permanently inhibit the family system from managing stress. It can be temporarily immobilize a family, but then lead to a different level of functioning than that experienced prior to the crisis and a family may in fact become stronger after experiencing and recovering from it (Boss, 1988).

Expansion of the ABC-X family stress model. Boss developed her Contextual Model of Family Stress (Figure 2) based on Hill's (1958) ABC-X Family Stress Model with some modifications to capture the stress process in families. Both Hill and Boss defined A, B, and C as the provoking or stressor event that results in change in the family, the family's resources or strengths, and the definition or meaning attached to the event by the family, respectively. However, while Hill defined X as the level of stress produced as a result of the interaction of A with B with C, Boss expanded the definition of X to include stress or crisis.

Boss's (2002) model accommodates cultural, religious, ethnic, and socio economic diversity, as well as variations in configurations among families including those of refugees from different parts of the world. Boss's model is also based on a post-modernist perspective which is in line with my epistemological and ontological stances on the acquisition of knowledge through meaning-making of experiences and the existence of multiple versions of reality. She believed

that the most influential aspect of the stress process in families was the ways in which families construct a shared meaning for the situation they experience.

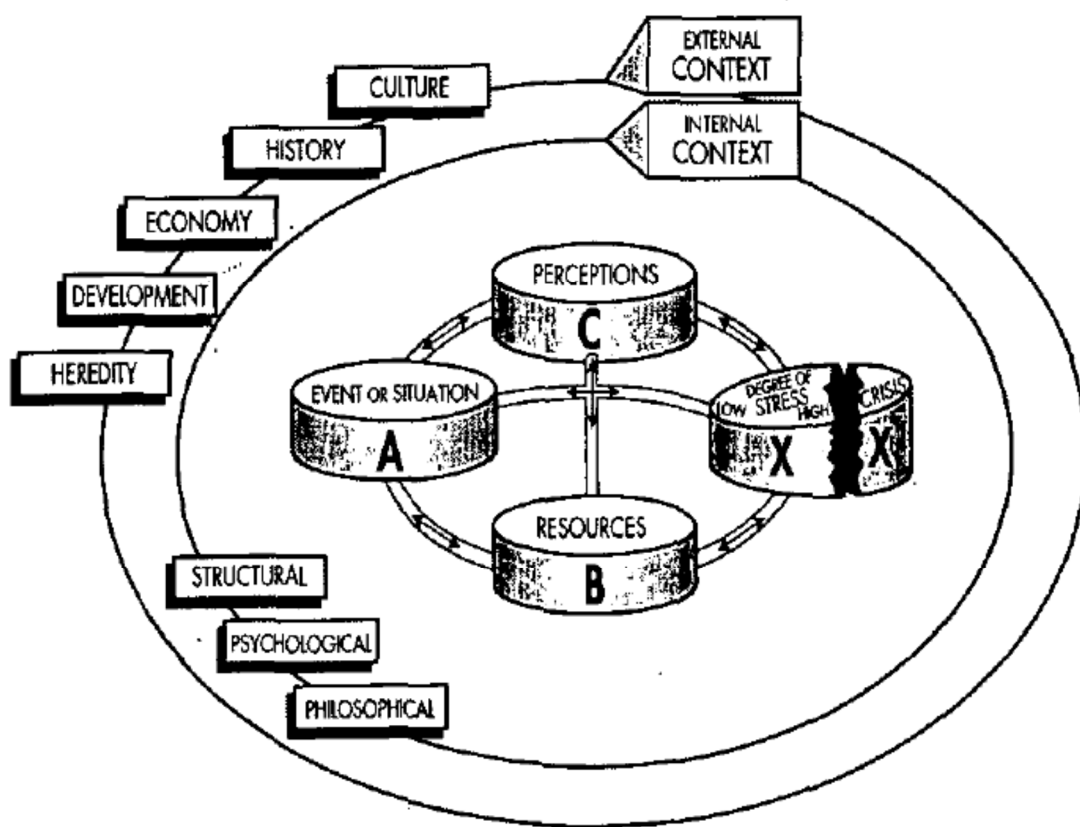


Figure 2. Contextual Model of Family Stress (Boss, 2002)

Patterson and Garwick (1994) defined family meaning as

the interpretations, images, and views that have been collectively constructed by family members as they interact with each other; as they share time, space, and life experience; and as they talk with each other and dialogue about these experiences. They are the family's social constructions, the product of their interactions; they belong to no one member, but to the family as a unit.

According to Boss (2002), the meaning of a stressful event to a family is also termed their perception and she asserted that their perception of an event is an important in explaining why, given the same event, some families can manage the resulting stress, whereas the event causes a crisis for other families. How the family perceives the event or situation that is happening to them is crucial in determining the degree of stress experienced by the family and the outcome.

External context. Boss (2002) viewed this stress/crisis process as occurring in both an external context and an internal context. She defined the external context as elements of a family's environment outside of their control that they cannot change. However, these elements do influence how families react to stressors. The dimensions of the external context are:

- *Cultural context*--includes the rules of society, as well as the rules of any subculture to which a family may belong. This difference can create incongruity between the rules for problem solving in the family's subculture and those in the mainstream culture which can create increased stress for a family. In the case of Iraqi refugee families who have resettled in the United States, there may be a conflict between the rules of Iraqi culture and those of American culture, and the family will be forced to reconcile with the incompatibility in order to manage the stress associated with such upon resettlement.
- *Historical context*--includes both events going on at the time of the stress, as well as events experienced by earlier generations which may involve trauma being transmitted across generations within families. In the case of Iraqi refugee families, their ability to manage their current stress or crisis is influenced not only by the specific nature of the political conflict they have endured in their homeland during the pre-migration phase, but also that experienced by previous generations. The traumatic effects which may be

passed down inter-generationally, may affect the ability of subsequent generations of refugees to cope and manage additional stress in the future.

- *Economic context*--includes the financial situation both in the community as well as the larger society. With regard to Iraqi refugee families, the status of the U.S. economy will affect their ability to resettle here and become financially self-sufficient. For example, if the U.S. economy is weak, the United States may offer admission to fewer refugees; the ones that are admitted may have greater difficulty procuring employment due to high rates of joblessness, and may also receive lower rates of government financial assistance.
- *Developmental context*--refers to the stages in the life cycles of both the family and each individual family member. With regard to Iraqi refugee families, the family will have a different resettlement experience if they are a younger family with numerous young children as opposed to an older family with elderly members. The younger children may more quickly adapt to the new language and culture, as opposed to families with older members who may be less able to adapt to the new culture and environment, and who are less amenable to change.
- *Hereditary context*--refers to genetics that influence such things as health, stamina, and energy, as well as other resources families can use to manage stress. With regard to Iraqi refugee families, if a member of a refugee family has health issues that are exacerbated by stress, the conditions may be more likely to surface during the trans- and post-migration phases. In addition, if the family member requires medical care in order to manage these conditions, the stress that the family incurs could be increased if treatment

is not accessible and the family member continues to suffer as a result, or if the treatment incurs financial burden for the family.

Internal context. Additionally, Boss (2002) defined the internal context of the family as elements that the family can change and control. The internal context can be different at times for different family members. The dimensions of the internal context Boss described are:

- *Structural context*-- refers to the form and function of family boundaries, role assignments, and rules about who is within or who is outside of the boundaries of the family. When the boundary of a family is unclear leading to boundary ambiguity (BA) (see discussion below), there is a lack of clarity in the structural context of the family and stress occurs. Iraqi refugee families must deal with a high level of BA since the resettlement process may require them to shift the roles, rules, and responsibilities of family members, at least temporarily, as they proceed through the resettlement process.
- *Psychological context*--refers to a family's perception, appraisal, definition, or assessment of a stressful situation, including both the cognitive and affective processes. Depending on the psychological context, a family will mobilize its resources to varying degrees and resolve the issue to move past the stressor or become immobilized by it such that it becomes a crisis. For Iraqi refugee families, the quality of their resettlement experience and the ease with which they overcome potential obstacles will be influenced by how they perceive the migration, either positively or negatively. The more negatively they assess resettlement, the more difficulty they may have in their adjustment and adaptation process.

- *Philosophical context*--refers to a family's values and beliefs and how they influence meanings in families. An individual family, for example, can live by rules that are different from those of the larger culture to which the family belongs. This individual difference in a family's values and beliefs can influence the meaning it attaches to a stressor and subsequently how the family manages the stress associated with it. For Iraqi refugee families, the belief they assign to their resettlement can influence their experiences with the process, and may be influenced partly by Iraqi culture and partly by the beliefs of the individual family. For example, a family may blame itself for an obstacle it encounters or believes it should have done something differently to avoid it, such as not being able to procure employment quickly enough upon resettlement in the United States. Moreover, a family may adopt an attitude of complete passivity by giving up looking for employment. However, a family may have more difficulty coping and controlling the family stress than if it can adopt an attitude of mastery in which it believes it has the ability to control its outcome to some extent. A more focused discussion of how Islamic beliefs may influence Iraqi refugee families' values and attitudes and how they process these experiences is found subsequently in the section on the role of faith and spirituality in Chapter 2.

Boundary ambiguity (BA). One key concept in Boss's (2002) model that is particularly relevant to refugee families' resettlement experience is BA. Boss posited that BA is a state in which family members are uncertain in their perception about who is "in or out" of the family and who is performing what roles or tasks within the family. BA results from incongruence in psychological and physical presence in the family. It can occur (but does not have to) when facts

are not clear or when facts are clear but the family denies or ignores them. Family BA is a continuous variable and can range from high to low in families. Two situations that may create high boundary ambiguity are (1) physical absence with psychological presence or (2) physical presence with psychological absence.

An example of BA in the case of Iraqi refugee families might be when family members become separated and one parent is left behind in Iraq or a bordering country during the migration process. As a result, the traditional roles of family members may shift, and the parent who is migrating to the United States will have to take on the responsibilities of both parents. It may be unclear how long the parent will be detained and separated from the rest of the family and whether the parent who is absent is still considered a functioning member of the family system.

Ambiguous loss. Another key concept that Boss (1999) introduced in her model that is related to BA which is particularly relevant to refugee families' experiences is that of ambiguous loss. She described ambiguous loss as a loss that remains unclear because of uncertainty or lack of information about the condition or location of a loved one, material possession, emotional state, or homeland. This loss may present itself as something that remains physically present, but psychologically absent or psychologically present, but physically absent. Without resolution ambiguous loss can prevent decision-making by families and can lead to what Boss (2002) termed as a frozen or unresolved grieving process which prevents families from moving forward and managing stress effectively. An example of ambiguous loss for Iraqi refugee families might be if the husband of a family is forcibly detained or kidnapped by an Iraqi militant group member and the remainder of the family including the wife and children are forced to flee their

home to save their lives. As a result, they may not be able to learn the whereabouts of the husband or even confirm whether he is alive or not prior to their primary migration out of Iraq or their secondary migration to permanently resettle in a host country such as the United States.

Nominal Definitions

Immigrant. This term refers to a person who has chosen to leave his or her country of permanent residence or citizenship voluntarily, not under duress or due to threats to his or her personal safety, and move to a new country to build a new life.

Refugee. This term refers to someone who has involuntarily chosen to flee his or her country of permanent residence or citizenship, because he or she was in imminent danger, or whose personal safety could not be guaranteed by his or her country's government. This person either took up temporary residence in a bordering country or was granted legal permanent status in another country that was willing to accept him or her.

Refugee family. This term refers to a family who has fled its country of origin as a unit, travelled to the United States together, and whose members have been co-residential since arriving in a mid-sized southeastern U.S. city.

Internally displaced person (IDP). This term refers to a person who has been displaced from his or her home due to conflict or violence, but who has not crossed the border out of his or her country of permanent residence.

Homeland. This term refers to the country from which refugees originate during pre-migration or the country they resided in prior to the conflict that forced them to migrate.

Host country. This term most frequently refers to the country in which a refugee resettles during the post-migration period. The term *receiving country* is also used.

Adaptation. This term refers to the process of change that refugees undergo in order to increase their compatibility with the new environment in their host country.

Forced migration. This term refers to refugees' fleeing from their homeland to another country under duress due to a lack of personal safety and security.

Primary migration. This term refers to refugees' initial moves from their homeland to either a bordering country or refugee camp which provides temporary shelter or directly to a host country for permanent resettlement.

Secondary migration. This term refers to refugees' moving from temporary shelter in a bordering country or refugee camp to permanent resettlement in a host country.

Resettlement. This term refers to the process that refugees undergo, including their experiences during the pre-migration, trans-migration, as well as the post-migration phase, when they arrive in their host country and attempt to rebuild a new life for themselves, whereby they take up permanent residence and work toward self-sufficiency in their host country.

Summary

Because the displacement and safety of Iraqi citizens in Iraq and bordering countries continues to be threatened due to the ongoing political conflict in the Middle East, the number of Iraqis seeking refugee status and opting for third country resettlement can be expected to increase globally. Since the United States accepts more refugees for resettlement than any other developed country in the world, the number of newly admitted Iraqi refugees resettling here annually has the potential to increase, or at the very least remain constant. Consequently, it is imperative for government and non-governmental agencies that develop policies and implement programs that serve these newly arrived residents to have a clearer understanding of their

experiences prior to, during, and after resettlement from the refugees' perspective, so they can be in an optimal position to assist them.

A description of the stages of migration for refugees in general and a profile of the cultural context for the life that Iraqi refugees left behind, and their day-to-day life was presented. This profile, along with the external context that refugees must contend with once in the United States, demonstrates that resettling to a new host country whose culture is extremely different from one's homeland, as is the case for Iraqi refugees, is a complex process which requires an inordinate amount of patience and effort in order to successfully navigate.

While more is known about refugees from other countries who have settled in the United States, much less is known about Iraqi refugees and Iraqi refugee families. Towards that end, the present study was designed to address this under-explored phenomenon from a qualitative perspective utilizing phenomenological methodology to describe Iraqi refugee families' lived experiences with resettlement in the United States. This study was theoretically anchored by Boss's (2002) Contextual Model of Family Stress, which provided an appropriate lens through which to examine this phenomenon.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In my review of the literature, initially I summarize the history of U.S. refugee policy in order to provide a foundation for the evolution of the U.S. government's present attitude toward, and treatment of, refugees. Next, I describe the current U.S. refugee admission process and entitlements offered to refugees upon their arrival to the United States. Additionally, I summarize the current status of Iraqi refugees in the United States, Tennessee, and the city in which the present study was conducted specifically, as well as the services offered by and the involvement of a refugee program with the local Iraqi refugee population. Next, I present an exhaustive summary of empirical studies focusing exclusively on Iraqi refugees' resettlement experiences. Finally, I present a broader synthesis of the literature which focuses on empirical scholarly work related to the resettlement experience for refugee families in general.

History of U.S. Refugee Policy

The United States has historically upheld a policy of admitting refugees into the country who are of particular humanitarian concern. Following the admission of over 250,000 displaced Europeans in the aftermath of World War II, the first refugee legislation enacted by the U.S. Congress was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 (Refugee Council USA, n.d.). This legislation provided for the admission of an additional 400,000 displaced Europeans. Numerous other international conflicts and environmental disasters occurred in the following decades, which resulted in the admission of additional displaced persons into the United States. As a result, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which incorporated the United Nations definition of "refugee" and standardized the resettlement services for all refugees admitted to the United States (Refugee Council USA, n.d.). The Refugee Act provides the legal basis for today's

Refugee Admissions Program, and is administered by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the Department of State (DOS) in conjunction with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and offices in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (Refugee Council USA, n.d.). Since 1975, the United States has admitted over 3 million refugees from all over the world. These refugees have built new lives, homes, and sometimes communities in towns and cities in all 50 states (U.S. Department of State, 2013a).

Current U.S. Refugee Admission Process and Policies

Resettlement to the United States for refugees is voluntary, and refugees must decide for themselves whether relocating here is the right choice for them and their families based on their unique circumstances. If a refugee decides to proceed with the application process, then most applicants are first interviewed by the UNHCR, or another related agency, in order to determine if the individual is appropriate to refer for admission. According to the U.S. DOS (2013b), refugees must first be referred in order to apply for resettlement to the United States. When UNHCR or, occasionally, a U.S. Embassy or a specially trained non-governmental organization (NGO), refers a refugee applicant to the United States for resettlement, the case is first received and processed by a Resettlement Support Center (RSC), which is funded by the U.S. government. The RSCs assist eligible refugees with the application process for U.S. resettlement consideration. Some refugees can start the application process with the RSC without a referral from UNHCR or other body. These refugees include those with close relatives already in the United States and refugees who belong to specific groups set forth in statute or identified by the DOS as being eligible for direct access to the program (U.S. Department of State, 2013b).

Officers from the DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) review all the information that the RSC has collected, and also conduct an in-person interview with each refugee applicant before deciding whether to approve him or her for resettlement in the United States. The decision to approve admission for a refugee is based on individual need, a security clearance, and a health assessment. Those refugees who are approved by USCIS receive assistance upon arrival to the United States through the DOS's Reception and Placement Program which is a cooperative public-private program made up of a number of participants, including local agencies. While the total processing time varies depending on an applicant's location and other circumstances, the average time from the initial UNHCR referral to arrival as a refugee in the United States is about 12-15 months (U.S. DOS, 2013b).

Refugee Benefits on the Federal, State, and Local Level

Federal Level

When refugees arrive in the United States they have legal resident status and are entitled to all of the rights and responsibilities of legal residents. Furthermore, refugees are on an expedited path to U.S. citizenship as compared to other immigrants to the United States. After 1 year, refugees are expected to apply for permanent residence, and after 5 years they may apply for U.S. citizenship (U.S. DOS, 2013c).

Refugees are only eligible to receive federal medical and cash assistance through the refugee resettlement programs for 8 months after they arrive (U.S. DOS, 2013c). Since the assistance is temporary and not intended to fully support their needs, they are encouraged to try to find employment within the first few months of resettlement (USCRI, 2014). Refugees have access to and are eligible for all services to which U.S. citizens are entitled. Still, in order to receive services, such as federally subsidized health insurance (Medicaid) or the supplemental

nutrition assistance program (e.g., food stamps), refugees must meet all eligibility standards for these public assistance programs (U.S. DOS, 2013c). Refugees are issued unrestricted social security numbers upon their arrival, which assists them in finding employment and applying for public assistance (Social Security Administration, n.d.).

State Level

The federal government designates an office in each state to serve as the administrator of the state refugee resettlement program. In 2012, it was estimated that approximately 57,900 refugees and their descendants were residing in Tennessee (Lee, 2013). Currently, the Tennessee Office for Refugees (TOR), which is a department of the Catholic Charities of Tennessee, Inc., is designated to provide cash and medical assistance, as well as social services, to refugees in Tennessee (Lee, 2013). The Tennessee Refugee Program is funded by the USORR and aids refugees with access to cash and medical assistance, initial medical screenings, employment, social adjustment services, and English language training.

Local Level

While the federal government provided each refugee a stipend of \$1875 per person in 2012 for his or her rent, furniture, food, and clothing within the first few months of their arrival, only half of that stipend went directly to the refugee. The other half covered employee salaries, operating costs, overhead, supplies etc. for the local refugee resettlement agency (J. Cornwell, personal communication, Feb. 25th, 2014). Additionally, much of the material possessions refugees acquire, and services they receive upon their arrival to the United States are donated by local charities, religious organizations, and private citizens (Lee, 2013).

The local refugee resettlement program, from where I identified potentially suitable participating families, works in partnership with the TOR to provide case management services to resettling refugees. It is a non-profit organization which operates on federal and state appropriated funding designated for refugee services, as well as funds from grants and donations. This resettlement agency aims to facilitate resettlement for refugees, and to empower them to become self-sufficient. The following services are provided by the organization within the first 30 days of the refugee's arrival (Bridge Refugee Services, Inc., 2012):

- Organize airport reception to greet the family
- Provide initial supply of food
- Arrange housing
- Present personal safety orientation
- Help family members apply for social security cards
- Register families for cash/medical assistance/food stamps
- Offer employment services and ESL lessons
- Make at least one home visit to each family
- Ensure that every refugee has a medical examination

In summary, while the refugee admissions policies, protocols, and benefit entitlements are mandated by the federal government, state and ultimately local agencies are responsible for following through with the administration of such policies and benefits. Consequently, the greatest degree of direct assistance that refugees receive upon resettlement into a U.S. city comes from the local agency staff members who serve as liaisons to them in their new host country. Though resettlement agencies do much to facilitate resettlement, adaptation to the United States may not be a simple process for Iraqi refugees as they attempt to connect their lives between two very different contexts – their Iraqi culture and the American way of life.

A comparison of the context of daily life in Iraq presented in Chapter 1 with that of the United States makes it clear that upon resettlement to this country, Iraqi refugee families are abruptly forced to adjust to major differences in their ways of life with regard to religious, ethnic, educational, economic, and social contexts. The ease with which family members adjust to these changes will affect the quality of the entire family's resettlement experience. In order to situate my present study on the resettlement experiences of Iraqi refugee families within the current literature, I initially provide an exhaustive examination of the current state of knowledge on resettlement experiences for individual Iraqi refugees, as opposed to a focus on families since there is a paucity of research focused on refugee families from Iraq. Subsequently, I conclude by more broadly summarizing prior research on resettlement for refugee **families** from other countries.

Resettlement Experiences of Iraqi Refugees

With the exception of one study, scholarly empirical literature that examines Iraqi refugees focuses on the resettlement experiences of individuals rather than families. The majority of Iraqi refugees who have previously been studied resettled in westernized countries, including the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Australia. However, it is important to note that many of these studies have been conducted by researchers who are of Middle Eastern and/or Arab descent and are well acquainted with the culture and customs of Iraqi people. Four recurring themes emerged from the scholarly literature on Iraqi refugees' experiences with resettlement: (1) the role of faith and spirituality, (2) psychological adjustment and mental health, (3) economic adjustment, and (4) anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bias. These elements serve as resources for and barriers to effective stress management during the resettlement process.

Findings related to each identified theme are presented to characterize Iraqi refugee resettlement research.

The Role of Faith and Spirituality

While many Iraqi refugees who have resettled have been exposed to and have experienced trauma and loss, many of them were able to find strength and solace from their strong religious and spiritual faith, which served as a resource for effective stress management (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). The vast majority of Iraqi refugees whose resettlement experiences have been studied practice Islam. Muslims have extremely deep rooted beliefs that provide them a strong foundation for support and allow them to cope with the stress associated with their painful and devastating past and their often unpredictable and uncertain future circumstances.

A significant feature of Islam that is particularly relevant to Iraqi refugees' pre-migration experience is related to attitudes toward death and martyrdom. Given that the death of an individual is divinely ordained, one need not accept guilt for the loss. Moreover, Muslims believe that God will punish an injustice that occurs to faithful followers of the religion. Hence, the matter is left to God and the trauma is accepted as God's will (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Mollica, 2007). Furthermore, interviews conducted with the victims and survivors of violence in Arab countries revealed that they did not feel alone in the crisis and that the calamities that befell them were not only personal, but also were shared among the community (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Elbedour et al., 1999; Sondergaard et al., 2001; Laban et al., 2004). This form of family and social support is prominent among Middle Eastern populations. The spiritual practices of these groups, which include Iraqi refugees, may have

served as buffers for them against the negative emotional impact of traumatic experiences which they may have endured prior to migration (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Mollica, 2007).

Numerous Iraqi refugees also used their practice of and strong spiritual faith to overcome their feelings of being “caught between two worlds.” Iraqi refugees who have resettled in the United States have reported feeling “in limbo” between their homeland, for which they felt strong allegiance as well as fear, and the host country they were currently living in where they did not necessarily believe they would permanently settle (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). Their faith and spirituality helped them to cope while in the United States, even in the absence of community support, due to the schisms between various Arab groups in Detroit, one of the largest Arab communities in the United States. Additionally, due to the cultural differences between Iraq and the United States, some Iraqi refugee women reported feeling like they had lost their true identity as ordained by their faith since they were unable to maintain their role of appropriately serving their husbands and families. In the meantime, those refugees that were not committed to permanently resettling in the United States continued to have hope that they would eventually be able to return to Iraq (Shoeb et al., 2007).

Psychological Adaptation and Mental Health Issues

Psychological adaptation is the process by which individuals change in order to achieve a better fit with the host society (Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988) and the aspects of mental health have often been used to assess it. Psychological adaptation is not easy for refugees because cross-cultural migration is a highly stressful process. As a result of this stress, it has been consistently demonstrated that refugees exhibit clinical symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD, relational difficulties, as well as somaticized physical ailments at higher rates than the general

population (e.g., Ai et al., 2002; Bhui et al., 2003; Lin, 1986; Keyes, 2000; Steel, Silove, Phan & Bauman, 2002; Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2011). Iraqi refugees are no exception and experience the same mental health issues upon resettlement as refugees from other regions (Al Obaidi, & Atallah, 2009; Jamil et al., 2007; Jamil et al., 2010). Higher levels of psychological distress and mental health problems can serve as a barrier to effective stress management upon resettlement.

Predictors of psychological distress. When psychological distress was assessed clinically, motivation for migration, educational level, and the presence of social support from family were significant predictors of higher levels of psychological adjustment among male Iraqi refugees who resettled in the southeast United States (Takeda, 2000). Refugees who viewed the migration process with optimism and who were committed to investing their full effort into a successful transition displayed higher levels of psychological adjustment. Conversely, those who were less enthusiastic about the resettlement process and viewed it instead as a temporary situation with the hopes of returning to Iraq reported lower levels of psychological adjustment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007).

Dismissal and stigmatization. In general, poor psychological adjustment and mental health problems that may have developed as a result of Iraqi refugees' exposure to traumatic experiences and violence during the pre- and trans-migration period serve as barriers to effective stress management during the resettlement period. Moreover, an attitude inherent in Iraqi culture that adopts the discounting of psychological and mental health issues functions as a deterrent to disclosure and intervention. For example, under Saddam's regime, the belief was emphasized that people who were faithful Muslims could not experience mental illnesses. Additionally,

mental illness is very highly stigmatized among Iraqis because its presence in a family can lead to labeling that family's offspring as unfit for marriage. For both of these reasons, psychiatrists working with Iraqi refugees noted that Iraqi patients with mental health issues would present with somatic complaints instead of psychological ones (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Mollica, 2007).

Protective and risk factors. A small number of studies have been undertaken with adult survivors of war in Iraq and other Arab countries which examined their psychological condition after the conflict. Several consistent findings are of note. First, religious faith, a sense of commitment to a political cause, and psychological preparation for torture all appeared to provide some protection against adverse psychological consequences (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Elbedour et al., 1999). Second, in the posttraumatic context, loss of social networks and separation from family members were important factors that seemed to perpetuate psychiatric symptoms, particularly depression and PTSD (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Schreuders, & De Jong, 2004). Third, social factors upon resettlement, such as language proficiency, social and economic adversity, fear of deportation, and anxiety about situations in the homeland, appeared to be influential in preventing recovery from PTSD and other forms of psychosocial distress (Laban et al., 2004; Sondergaard, Ekblad, & Theorell, 2001). Finally, the majority of participants described distinct somatization reactions such as complaints of headaches, stomach pain, or breathing difficulties (Elbedour et al., 1999; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Laban et al., 2004; Sondergaard et al., 2001).

Incidence of PTSD. Interestingly, given the severity of the reported traumas among the participants in these studies, their rates of PTSD were not as high or widespread as compared to

that of refugee populations from other regions of the world (Elbedour et al., 1999; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Laban et al., 2004; Sondergaard et al., 2001). Shueb et al., (2007) asserted that this difference reflected this region's cultural and spiritual background and the protective effects of their faith as described in the previous section. However, PTSD definitely existed among newly resettled Iraqi refugees. The rate of PTSD among recently arrived Iraqi refugees in Sweden was 37% (Sondergaard et al., 2001) which is comparable to the 32% of recently resettled Iraqi refugees in the Netherlands that were found to exhibit PTSD symptoms (Laban et al., 2004). These rates are significantly higher than the 8% prevalence of PTSD in the general population in the United States (Kessler et al., 1995), which indicates that a much higher percentage of recently resettled Iraqi refugees are struggling with the continuing effects of traumatization when compared to the general population.

Culture gap. An additional factor that contributed to lower levels of psychological adjustment for Iraqi refugees was the extent of the culture gap that they are faced with during the resettlement process. Iraqi cultural life, as depicted in the previous section that described the cultural context in Iraq is very different from that of most of the westernized host countries into which they resettle. Consequently, Iraqi refugees may experience more stress than other refugee groups that resettle in host countries with cultures that are more similar to their own. This resultant stress could have a negative impact on their psychological adjustment and mental health (Ward & Change, 1997; Waxman, 2001).

Social support. Due to the high value placed on family by Iraqis, Iraqi refugees who were single or migrated without family members lacked strong emotional social support which is culturally defined as an integral aspect of their lives and a source of great comfort during

stressful periods such as resettlement (Takeda, 2000). Consequently, those without immediate family or extended family support demonstrated lower levels of psychological adjustment. Due to the nature of the circumstances of Iraqi refugees' migration, they tend to have fewer family members in the host country than other refugee groups which makes their psychological adjustment more difficult in this respect. However, resettling in a community with a previously established Arab or Iraqi population seems to serve as a protective factor that can buffer the effects of the lack of family support (Takeda, 2000).

Residency status. Additionally, upon resettlement in a host country, residency status was found to be a factor that predicted Iraqi refugees' mental health. Iraqi refugees that were seeking asylum and living in the Netherlands with non-permanent status for longer than 2 years were found to be at greater risk for mental health issues such as anxiety, depressive and somaticized illnesses than those that had been living there for less than 6 months (Laban et al., 2004). These results suggest that the stress inherent in the uncertainty of the refugees' residential status and the fear of deportation back to their war-torn and politically unstable homeland may negatively impact their mental health as the experience of uncertainty extends over time. A number of other researchers reported that refugees' psychiatric disorders decreased the longer refugees remained in a host country, possibly due to the decrease in exposure to unsafe living conditions (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Weine et al., 1998; Westermeyer et al., 1984). Consequently, removal from the threatening environment in their homeland likely led to a decrease in stress levels created by the danger. However, the refugees in these studies had permanent residency status, so stress related to the uncertainty of their residential status and the threat of deportation were irrelevant for them.

Parents and children. Finally, I located only one Iraqi refugee study that was family-focused, and it examined the relationship between the psychological well-being of Iraqi refugee parents and the adjustment of their children to their host country of Great Britain (Hosin et al., 2006). The results of this study indicated that the level of psychological distress among parents, as measured by a clinical self-assessment of psychological distress, was very high. Additionally, psychological distress of parents was positively correlated with children's poorer adjustment in the host country and their level of distress (Hosin et al., 2006). In other words, parental distress and their children's distress were strongly positively associated.

Moreover, newly resettled Iraqi refugee parents reported more psychological distress than those who had been in the host country for a longer period of time, as did parents who had more than one child at home. Hosin et al. (2006) suggested that the manifestations of social, emotional, and behavioral problems among children may reflect difficulties in their family context, as well as isolation, a lack of skills and social support in the new and unfamiliar culture. Parents who were struggling with the effects of their own past traumas, as well adjusting to a new and unfamiliar culture may not provide the psychological care their children need. This study emphasized the importance of addressing both refugee parents and children's mental health needs early-on in the resettlement process, so families can be in an optimal position to navigate the challenges facing them as they attempt to adjust to living in their host country.

Economic Status and Adjustment

A summary obtained from a survey conducted by the ORR on the economic status of Iraqi refugees who entered and resettled in the United States between May 2007 and April 2009 was provided (USDHHS, 2011). The following description presents the economic situation

which Iraqi refugees must manage and navigate once they have resettled in the United States and captures part of the external context which Boss (2002) included in her model of family stress.

According to the ORR report which covered the fiscal year 2011, the average number of people living in a Iraqi refugee household was 4.69, and 70% of these households had at least one member younger than age 16. Only 40% of the households had at least one member who spoke English fluently. Approximately 62% of refugees received medical assistance through Medicaid programs or refugee medical assistance programs. The same survey report indicated that approximately 22% of all adult refugees included in the survey lacked medical coverage in the 12 months prior to the survey. Finally, 81% reported relying on food stamps in order to purchase food for their families.

The 2011 ORR annual survey (USDHHS, 2011) also covered employment status and revealed a 36% employment rate among Iraqi refugee respondents age 16 and over, which is significantly lower than the 58% rate for the general U.S. population. The major reasons reported for not looking for work were (1) attending school or training (37%), (2) poor health (32%), and (3) child care or family responsibilities (21%). Additionally, among those Iraqi refugees who have ever worked in the United States, it took the majority of them (62%) at least 7 months, and many (38%) needed over 1 year to get their first job.

Reported demographics for refugees in the state of Tennessee for the fiscal year of 2011 indicated that for the Iraqi refugees that were employed, the average wage was \$7.92 per hour (USDHHS, 2011) as compared to mean hourly wage of \$18.90 for the general population in Tennessee (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). These statistics demonstrate that Iraqi refugee families struggled to “make ends meet” soon after their arrival to the United States, and that their

quest for self-sufficiency could become more difficult when the cash and non-cash assistance from government sources is no longer available after their first 8 months of resettlement. This survey report also indicated that success in achieving economic independence was closely associated with achieving fluency in English. Accordingly, the more quickly a refugee is able to speak English fluently, the more easily he or she will gain employment.

As can be surmised from the above economic profile, the path to economic self-sufficiency can be a difficult one to navigate when refugees are suddenly faced with a myriad of changes in many facets of their lives. Successful achievement of economic self-sufficiency may serve as a resource for effective stress management for Iraqi refugees during the resettlement process, while extended periods of economic dependence may serve as a barrier. Specifically, the pace at which at least one member of the family is able to procure employment has a significant impact on the quality of refugees' adjustment in other life domains. In general, newly arrived refugees are encouraged and expected to start searching for employment shortly after their arrival. In fact, many of their state and federal govt. benefits are dependent on their demonstration of due diligence when job searching (J. Cornwell, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2014). With employment comes an additional level of independence from government cash assistance which is extremely time limited, as well as autonomy in purchasing an automobile and selecting their choice of residence. Most importantly, refugees who obtain employment can achieve a greater sense of economic security which will assist them in more effectively managing their overall stress levels.

Employment and language fluency. A number of factors influence Iraqi refugees' quality of economic adjustment upon resettlement in a host country. They include their fluency

in the host language, motivation for migration, length of stay in the host country, and level of educational and professional training (Takeda, 2000). For male Iraqi refugees who resettled in the United States, economic adjustment, as measured by income, was surprisingly not predicted by the level of English fluency as has been found with other refugee groups. However, another study that examined the economic adjustment of Iraqi, Bosnian, and Afghani refugees in Australia, found that English language fluency was strongly correlated with employment status and level of income (Waxman, 2001). This inconsistency may be attributed to differences in economic climate or employment rates between the two countries, the fact that the economic adjustment of Iraqi refugees with respect to English fluency in the latter study was not reported separately, or that the relationship between English language fluency and economic adjustment for Iraqi refugees was complex and confounded by other variables such as educational level.

Educational level. Nonetheless, economic adjustment was negatively correlated with level of education, but positively correlated with length of stay, and motivation for migration. The longer Iraqi refugees have been in the United States, the higher their income and rate of employment, which was perhaps a result of increased social support from friends over time leading to procurement of employment through networking (Takeda, 2000). However, with regard to education, more highly educated Iraqi refugees had poorer economic adjustment because of their unwillingness to work in low paying unskilled positions due to embarrassment or lack of satisfaction, and thus some ended up on public assistance (Takeda, 2000).

Additionally, they were often not able to find employment in their professional fields either because they did not possess their diplomas or certificates to prove their level of education or their credentials were not accepted in the United States. Because of these issues, highly educated

Iraqi refugees who spoke English fluently and had been in the United States for an extended length of time were often not able to find jobs in their field and thus remained unemployed or greatly underemployed (Takeda, 2000; Waxman, 2001).

Camp internment and motivation. Additionally, Iraqi refugees who had spent time interred in refugee camps, in Saudi Arabia for example, had more difficulty finding employment upon resettlement during the post migration period due to erosion of their skills when compared to those who had lived temporarily with legal status in a bordering country and had the opportunity to continue to work (Waxman, 2001). Finally, Iraqi refugees who viewed their stay in a host country as temporary and preferred to return to Iraq or another Arab country where they could immerse themselves and their family in an Islamic culture experienced lower levels of economic adjustment because they were less willing to make long term commitments to employment (Al-Rasheed, 1992)

Anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim Bias upon Resettlement

In addition to exposure to traumatic events during the migration process and navigating cultural differences, which most all refugees contended with to some extent, Iraqi refugees may also have to cope with anti-Iraq and anti-Arab attitudes in the United States. Despite the fact that these refugees were opposed to Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi government, a negative sentiment against Iraqi refugees has developed in our society because they were from the hostile country of the Gulf War (Kaslow & Moffett, 1995) and subsequent conflicts. In addition, Iraqi refugees have suffered from negative stereotypes about Arabs in western societies. The Arab negative stereotype includes the perception of them as terrorists who threaten peace and security, participants in a male-dominated society, and characteristics such as being anti-American,

uncivilized, ruthless, barbaric, crazy, and cunning (Johnson, 1992). These negative images of Arabs have been exacerbated in recent years primarily due to the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 and then the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These events and others around the world, carried out by fundamentalist extremists from Arab nations, have encouraged a pervasive anti-Arab bias in Western culture (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007; Takeda, 2000). Exposure to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim discrimination has been found to serve as a barrier to effective stress management among Iraqi refugees.

The trauma model of discrimination and backlash has been applied to Iraqi refugees' chronic exposure to this anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim bias. From the perspective of this model, discrimination or backlash constitute a complex cumulative trauma which is ongoing in overt and covert forms and threatens the social identity of the individual (Kira et al., 2010). Furthermore, the model predicts that the trauma associated with such treatment creates stress for minority individuals who are targets; they suffer significant negative effects on both their physical and mental health (Carter, 2007). Consequently, the degree to which marginalized individuals are subjected to these experiences is positively associated with the extent of deleterious effects on their health.

Kira et al. (2010) explored the effects of discrimination and the backlash after 9/11 on resettled Iraqi and other Muslim refugees in the United States. They developed a scale to measure perceived backlash, the Backlash Trauma Scale (BTS). In this study, backlash was operationally defined as "intensified reactive acts of discrimination toward one or more minority group ... as a generalized overt or covert response to an act of aggression committed by individuals or groups perceived to be associated with that minority group" (Kira et al., p. 61).

The findings suggested that the BTS predicted PTSD and poorer health after controlling for the cumulative effects of other reported life traumas. These results provide evidence in support of the application of the trauma model of backlash and discrimination to Iraqi refugees' resettlement experiences and its importance for the effective treatment of Iraqi refugees in the post-9/11 era.

Summary of Iraqi Refugee Literature

It is apparent from the existing scholarly research on Iraqi refugee experiences that regardless of the specific country in which they resettle, they have numerous common struggles and barriers which they must overcome if they are to successfully adapt and move forward once in their new host country. While the role of faith and spirituality, whether rooted in Islam or Christianity, served as a resource for Iraqi refugees, psychological adaptation and mental health issues, economic status and adjustment, and exposure to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bias were also common issues that emerged for individual Iraqi refugees that have the potential to create increased stress for them during the resettlement process. These individuals have undoubtedly experienced varying degrees of loss and trauma during the pre- and trans-migration phases and face an excessive degree of change and potential stress moving forward during the post-migration phase and their resettlement process. Consequently, this stress experienced by individual Iraqis may also contribute to increased level of stress experienced by their families.

In order to further situate the present study in the existing research on resettlement experiences of refugee families, the remainder of my review will shift to research related to refugee families from other countries.

Resettlement Experiences of Refugee Families

In the following section I present an illustrative review of scholarly empirical research on experiences of refugee families from various parts of the world that are most relevant to and help to anchor my present study. Considering the extent of immigrant and refugee migration to this country, it is noteworthy that only two review articles that specifically addressed issues faced by immigrant and refugee families upon resettlement in the United States were identified (Bush, Bohon, & Kim, 2010; Segal & Mayads, 2005). The geographical regions that were most often represented in the research literature and upon which the exemplars were drawn are Asia, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Several predominant themes emerged from my review of this topic. In this body of research, refugee families have most frequently reported issues related to (1) differences in adaptation across generations, (2) economic strain and conflict in spousal relationships, (3) lack of familiarity with host country norms, and (4) separation, loss, and disruption of family function.

Differences in Adaptation across Generations

During the post-migration resettlement period, refugee children who have migrated to a host country with their parents are more quickly able to learn a new language, more readily adopt a new culture, and more easily form relationships with peers outside of their ethnic or racial group than their parents (Harkins, 2012; Isik-Ercan, 2012). Difficulties can occur in families when parents and children differ in their extent of acculturation which can result in an “acculturation gap” (Detzner, 1992; Lin, 1986; Weaver & Kim, 2008; Ying, Lee, Tsai, Lee & Tsang, 2001). Numerous studies have supported these findings, including Birman (2006) who examined the impact of acculturation gaps on family adjustment of adolescent refugees and their

parents. Families where children had high acculturation to the host culture and low acculturation to their native culture, and families where parents had high acculturation to the native culture and low acculturation to the host culture created the greatest gaps, and thus their families the experienced highest levels of conflict and stress (Birman, 2006).

In fact, refugee children often acculturate so readily that their parents may feel distress over their perceived loss of family cohesion and traditional family values created by their children's changes (Drachman & Ryan, 2001). More specifically, Farver et al. (2002) pointed out that ethnic minority youth from collectivist cultures often adopt the American cultural values of individualism and autonomy, which may lead to conflicts with their less acculturated parents. Along similar lines, Simon (1983) found that during the initial years of resettlement for refugee families, conflicts between parents and children most often arose with regard to threatened parental authority and children's activities outside of the home. Furthermore, a meta-analysis within the currently available empirical literature confirmed that an acculturation gap between immigrant parents and children in North America was significantly associated with both poorer family and individual youth functioning (Jung, M-J, 2013).

Differences in acculturation between parents and children can also impact parental satisfaction and parenting behaviors as reported by both mothers and children. For example, a study of immigrant mothers showed that the larger the perceived acculturation gap between mothers and their adolescents, the lower the mother's level of parenting satisfaction (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003). Additionally, acculturation differences between parents and children were related to children's more negative perceptions of their parents' parenting behaviors, and subsequently to increased family stress (Ying et al. 2001).

In addition, a qualitative study of refugee families with school aged children who had resettled in the United States revealed that while children's adaptability was advantageous for them in coping with loss and change, it often created additional grief for refugee parents who were forced to cope with yet another perceived loss (Isik-Ercan, 2012). In addition, since refugee children often learned their host country's new language more quickly than did their parents, they were able to communicate more readily than their parents with service providers, such as teachers, physicians, store clerks, and government agency employees. As a result, these children may be burdened with added responsibility when forced to take on the role of "language brokers" for their parents. Their parents may feel disempowered by their dependence on their children to interpret for them in order to get the family's needs met (e.g., Candappa & Igbini, 2003; Segal & Mayadas, 2005). These role changes for parents and children created increased levels of stress in refugee families (Jones & Trickett, 2005; Trickett & Jones, 2007). Additionally, in order to serve their families, these children who serve as "cultural or language brokers" may be asked to be involved in events that are inappropriate for their stage of development (Arredondo, Orjuela, & Moore, 1989).

Finally, the majority of studies that have examined the effects of the acculturation gap for members of refugee families only do so in one direction or perspective and neglect to explore the effects of this gap on family members bi-directionally to more fully and accurately grasp the impact on the family and their level of stress. Birman (2006), on the other hand, accounted for this important distinction in her study of refugee parents and children. She posited that by assessing the acculturation gap from both the parent and child's perspective and accounting for

the discrepancy, a more accurate and realistic appraisal of a family's conflict as a function of the size of the gap could be obtained.

Economic Strain and Conflict in Spousal Relationships

Not only are relationships between parents and children often disrupted and changed, but also the relational equilibrium between spouses may be affected as well. Changes in the spousal relationship in refugee families from the pre-migration to the post-migration period have an impact on the well-being of the entire family. Refugees have reported changes in their marital relationships, and thus in the functioning of their families during resettlement in the United States (Bush, et al., 2010; Fox, 1991).

Shift in gender roles. Refugees often described the transformation of their relationship from one of segregated marital roles, male domination, high spousal power differential, and an absence of shared decision making to one of shared spousal roles, greater gender egalitarianism, lower spousal power differential, and shared decision making (Fox, 1991). Refugee women whose homeland culture valued collectivism and male dominance attributed the shifts in the functioning of their marital relationship to the absence of extended family members in the United States and their working outside of the home (Bush et al., 2010; Fox, 1991). The combination of the women's increased exposure to American culture by working, their husbands' taking on childcare and household responsibilities, and the now-missing proximal influence of the husbands' parents promoted a more egalitarian spousal relationship, as well as increased shared decision making and a lower power differential (Fox et al., 2008; Harkins, 2012).

Economic strain. Economic strain has been defined as "the perceived adequacy of financial resources, financial concerns and worries, and expectations regarding one's future

economic situation” (Voydanoff & Donolley, 1988, p. 98). As with all families, economic strain is extremely pervasive and affects all decisions and choices that refugee families make. The most prevalent manner in which economic strain has been highlighted in the refugee family is the impact it has on the spousal relationship.

A major source of distress between couples is economically fueled and arises when husbands are not able to obtain employment in their profession and wives are forced to take on non-skilled jobs to help support their family. Some refugee women reported feeling empowered by this gain in independence and status, while others reported feeling uncomfortable with the loss of their traditional roles (Chun & Akutsu, 2003; Fox, 1991). Furthermore, many refugee men reported suffering from depression and apathy as a result of a shift in power in their spousal relationship and a perceived loss of their position as head-of-household when they were not able to obtain employment or earned a lower salary than their wives (Hitchcox, 1988; Ye-Chin, 1980). The ease with which refugee couples adapted to their new roles was in part influenced by husbands’ potential resentment over their loss of status and/or power or lowered self-esteem, or wives’ increased stress brought on by having to balance work and domestic responsibilities (Chun & Akutsu, 2003).

Consequently, as the women in these couples gained economic power, the potential increased for conflicts and changes within their family systems (Chung, Tucker and Takeuchi, 2008). Additionally, many refugee men who were able to comfortably financially support their families in their homeland prior to the conflict that initiated their flight, struggled to earn enough to minimally support their families during resettlement in their host country. Their sense of loss involved loss of a lifestyle and loss of social status. As a result, these families may have fewer

choices, which can increase the amount of stress these families face, and affect their family systems' ability to make the adjustments necessary for them to achieve a good quality of life in the United States (Bush et al., 2010).

Acculturation differences. Different rates of acculturation within couples can also increase the difficulty of renegotiating family and marital role. Therapists that have worked extensively with refugees have reported observing that a differential rate of acculturation between spouses was often related to marital problems (Chambon, 1989; Lin, 1986; van der Veer, 1992). Furthermore, researchers have found that Asian refugee men are more traditional and tend to integrate into U.S. culture less readily than do Asian refugee women, who tend to demonstrate more egalitarian attitudes (e.g., Chia, Moore, Lam, Chuang & Chang, 1994). These differences may create significant tension between refugee couples that can lead sometimes to increased incidences of domestic violence (Chambon, 1989). For example, higher rates of intimate partner violence have been found in resettled Asian couples when the wife earned as much or more than her husband and played a greater role in the decision making process. However, violence between the couple was much reduced when the husband had a greater income and dominated the decision-making process (Chung et al., 2008). These results suggested that conflicts between traditional gender roles and women's newly gained economic power can be a significant source of discord and potential violence between refugee couples. However, problems with employment and levels of spousal conflict were found to decrease the longer the refugee families had been resettled in the United States (Meredith et al., 1986).

Lack of Familiarity with Host Country Social Norms

Educational norms. Refugee families often experience stress as they adjust to life in their host country because they do not fully understand the new social norms. One area of adjustment relates to an educational system that is very different from that in their homeland. This can create stress, not only for refugee children who are attending school, but also for their parents. On the one hand, many refugee parents have expressed trust in U.S. schools for keeping their children safe and reverence for their global educational superiority (Isik-Ercan, 2012). However, they also experienced a disconnect from their children's school experience due to unfamiliarity with formal processes and hierarchy, language barriers, and lack of knowledge with the curriculum which can lead to an inability to assist their children with homework and school adjustment (Bhattacharya & Schopplerey, 2004). Moreover, some refugee parents did not understand the expectation for parental involvement in their children's education and school (Bush et al., 2010).

In addition, refugee parents have admitted experiencing a lack of acknowledgement for and sensitivity toward their unique religious, cultural, and ethnic beliefs and practices from educators and school administration (Chambon, 1989; Isik-Ercan, 2012). This lack of recognition, respect, or observance of refugee families' preferences created increased stress for parents who found it challenging to encourage their children to carry on their traditional ways of life and cultural values (Chambon, 1989; Isik-Ercan, 2012). Finally, for refugees that came from developing countries without formal educational systems, they may not have understood that children were required to attend school or that children who were enrolled in school must attend every weekday unless they were excused (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005).

Legal and cultural norms. Other social norms which refugee families who have recently migrated to the United States may not be aware of are those related to U.S. cultural and legal norms. For example, in numerous regions of the world, including the Middle East, it is common and culturally normative for parents to arrange a marriage between their teenage daughter and an older man who has reached majority age and is considered a legal adult in the United States (Ghareeb et al., 2008). However, in the United States, the marriage and sexual relations between a minor under 18 years of age and a legal adult is legally prohibited. Consequently, if refugee parents were to carry out this practice in this country, they could be ruled in violation of a statute illegalizing such activity and endangering a minor which could potentially lead to sanctions such as fines, probation, or the removal of the adolescent from the household (Bush et al., 2010).

An additional example of a cultural norm that refugee families subscribe to in their homeland that is not in alignment with those of the United States is polygamy. When a refugee arrives in the United States for resettlement with multiple spouses and numerous children, due to housing constraints and societal norms, the entire family unit will typically not be housed together under one roof (Chambon, 1989). Thus, the family dynamics and relationships between family members have been forced to shift and re-equilibrate as new family units were formed in order to accommodate societal norms dictated by the host country. Consequently, lack of awareness or “naivety” about a host country’s normal and accepted social practices has the potential to create stress for refugee families upon resettlement. This is particularly salient for refugee families who have experienced forced migration and, thus may not have ample opportunity to learn about the social customs of their host country prior to resettlement.

Loss, Separation, and Disruption of Family Function

Chambon (1989) described “whole families” as those who migrated together with all members intact, in contrast to those who were fragmented during the pre-migration phase that were described as migrating in “segments.” Unfortunately, in the past, government policies adopted a limited definition of family which encouraged migration in “segments.” As a result, these policies prevented significant family members from migrating together and served to keep them separated. These policies of only allowing immediate family members, such as parents and their minor children, to migrate and resettle in the same city of a host country can have far-reaching effects on some families’ abilities to adjust during resettlement. Alternatively, due to the unstable and violent conditions under which refugee families were often forced to flee, family members may become separated during the pre-migration phase, and then lose contact with one another. As a result, refugees may not know for certain if they have been separated from their loved ones temporarily, or if family members have actually been injured or killed as a result of the conflict.

Reactions to separation. Whether families have been separated due to government migration policies or as a consequence of the chaos ensuing in their homeland, refugee families have commonly reported feelings of loss and helplessness as a result of separation from their family and homeland (Papadopoulos, 2002; Rumbaut & Rumbaut, 1976). During the separation, stress experienced by the loss of family members leads to changes in the family system as family roles must be renegotiated and can lead to BA (boundary ambiguity) (Boss, 2002). Also, since this separation is often experienced as ambiguous loss if the whereabouts or the details

surrounding the condition of loved ones are unknown, this adjustment can take more time and be more difficult to accomplish.

Moreover, family members who are not willing or able to renegotiate roles are less likely to accomplish necessary tasks, or at least with the same level of competence as prior to the separation or loss (Boss, 2002). Interestingly, some refugee families reported increased levels of “homesickness” and concern for family members left behind in their homeland, the longer they had been resettled in the United States (Meredith et al., 1986). This shift in focus as time went on was possibly due to families’ decreased concerns with initial immediate daily needs such as procuring housing, employment, clothing etc., and thus provided additional opportunity for their increased focus on losses resulting from their forced migration (Meredith et al., 1986). Furthermore, Weine, Vojvoda, Hartman, and Hyman (1997) reported that refugee families’ traumatic experiences, such as separation from or loss of family members, were rarely shared or discussed within the surviving family. As a result, family members, each possessing his or her individual traumatic memories, may become isolated from one another, which can result in both communication breakdown and increased familial distress.

Loss of support networks. For women in families that came from non-westernized, non-industrialized regions where collectivism or closeness among extended families were not only valued, but believed to be necessary for adequate psycho-social support and healthy development, the loss of extended family is particularly devastating (Fox, 1991; Fox et al. 2008). Women from these cultures who depended on extended family for social support and assistance with domestic responsibilities were unaccustomed to connecting with and utilizing social networks outside of their family (Fox et al., 2008; Serafica, Weng, & Kim, 2000). As a result,

many women reported feeling extreme isolation and loneliness in their new host country and home, especially if their husbands were employed outside the home where they had an opportunity to learn the language and build relationships with others in the community. However, some women reported positive feelings associated with independence and sense of power since they were no longer under their husbands' family control as they had been in their homeland (Fox et al., 2008).

Separation of children from parents. With regard to the separation of refugee children from their parents during the forced migration process, the importance of keeping children and parents together in times of crisis to minimize psychological distress was empirically supported (Carlin, 1986; Williams, 1990). For example, children who were evacuated during the Second World War bombings of London showed more distress than those who stayed with their parents, and thus were more directly exposed to the war (Foster et al., 2003). Similarly, a study of young children exposed to war, found that children who lived in orphanages showed more signs of emotional distress five years later than those who lived in a refugee camp with one or both parents (Wolff & Fesseha, 1999).

Tracing and reunification. While refugee migration governmental policies are often designed to keep children and parents together during the migration process, unavoidable circumstances may occur in times of war and crisis so that families will not always be able to stay together and that children may be separated from their parents. Although there is strong support for reuniting refugee families, little published research has examined the efficacy and outcomes of programs with objectives to do so even though they have significant positive implications for children. One exception is a study by Charnley and Langa (1994), which

involved interviewing children and families that had participated in a tracing and reunification program. They discovered that the initiative was successful in reuniting families. While the study found little evidence that placement of children in unrelated substitute families led to maltreatment between children and caregivers, it did uncover problems associated with residential placements, including overcrowding, which had negative effects on children's emotional and physical health.

Even though there is general support for family tracing and reunification programs, the literature has highlighted some concerns. For example, Bonnerjea (1994), in a review of tracing programs and children's rights, noted the issue of considerable time elapsing between separation and reunification. In the interim, children may have developed new relationships with substitute caregivers. Reunification can thus involve another instance of disruption for children in this situation. Bonnerjea argued that this second separation may be difficult for very young children who have limited memories of family and home or for children who were reunited with distant relatives with whom they had never formed a previous relationship.

Moreover, research conducted with adult refugees suggested that the reunification process could be difficult after prolonged separations and in some cases, increased the distress experienced (Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya, & Measham, 2004). For example, a study of adults who had previously fled their homeland as refugees and then were reunited with their family in their homeland 40 years later yielded interesting results. Measures of their pre- and post-distress levels indicated that some individuals developed psychiatric symptoms, mainly depression, after their reunification (Tseng, Cheng, Chen, Hwang, & Hsu, 1993). While this research did not suggest that reunification of refugee families should be avoided, it did indicate that the process

can cause distress depending on the circumstances, so specifics of each case should be considered before proceeding.

While separation from, and loss of contact with family members during the migration process can be extremely stressful for refugee families, it can also serve as a catalyst to bring surviving families members closer and foster cohesiveness during the process of coping with the loss. Williams (1990) found that families who were detained in refugee camps and had lost family members during the pre-migration period reported that they found comfort and solace in banding together and more deeply valuing their relationships with their families as opposed to the loss creating increased stress, conflict, and turmoil. Moreover, they exhibited a sense of unity and pride in survivorship.

Research with traumatized families. Finally, clinicians and researchers have expressed concern about the possibility of re-traumatizing vulnerable populations that have previously been victims of violence and experienced excessive loss, such as refugees, by interviewing them and asking them to recall and share their potentially traumatic experiences. While from the perspective of researchers this outcome may seem inevitable, research participants who have been in this position have reported just the opposite effect. Bosnian refugee families who had previously participated in a qualitative study that explored the decision-making process involved in fleeing their homeland and remaining in their host country of Norway and inclusion of their children in that decision, reported obtaining substantial benefits from their participation and far fewer negative reactions. Both parents and children described experiencing an unburdening of painful memories to an empathetic listener and a feeling of relief and appreciation for others willing to listen to their perspectives (Dyregrov, Dyregrov, & Raundalen, 2000). Consequently, I

am hopeful the present study will serve similar benefits for the Iraqi refugee family members who choose to participate.

Summary

Since 2007, the United States has been offering an increasing number of Iraqi refugees the opportunity to permanently resettle within its borders due to the ongoing political conflict in Iraq and its neighboring countries. This population is a continually growing one in our country and warrants further study to help us to understand and describe this vulnerable group's experiences during resettlement. Initially, in order to comprehend the nature of the resettlement experience in the United States for refugees in general, a summary of the admission process and benefits provided to them was presented.

Next, since the present study focuses on the experiences of Iraqi refugee families, initially inquiry into scholarly research covering the resettlement experiences of Iraqi refugees was examined. Only one study was located that included the family as a unit of analysis and it was a quantitative in nature and focused exclusively on the parent-child dyad. All of the other previous Iraqi refugee research focused on the individual refugee as the unit of analysis. According to scholarly research literature in this field, the dominant resources for and barriers to effective stress management for Iraqi refugees upon resettlement are (1) the role of faith and spirituality, (2) psychological adaptation and mental health issues, (3) economic status and adjustment, and (4) anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bias.

Finally, inquiry into the scholarly research focused on the resettlement experiences of refugee families from various regions was explored. Major issues refugee families have struggled with are (1) adaptation differences across generations, (2) economic strain and conflict

in spousal relationships, (3) lack of familiarity with host country norms, and (4) separation, loss, and disruption of family function. All of these issues have the potential to increase the level of family stress and create conflict among family members during a period in which families are managing enormous change and are required to successfully adapt if they are going to be able to put their lives back together and move forward.

As a result of this review of the present state of knowledge on resettlement experiences of refugee families in general, and those of Iraqi refugees, it became apparent that a gap existed in describing the resettlement experience in the United States for Iraqi refugee families. Consequently, the present study serves to fill this gap. Additionally, it provides valuable information and insight into this experience, from a qualitative perspective, for policy makers, clinicians, and social service providers as they design and implement policies and programs to optimally meet the needs of these vulnerable families and improve the quality of their lives in the short and long term.

Chapter 3

Materials and Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of Iraqi refugee families who resettled in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States. Using existential phenomenology as the guiding research methodology, I sought to gain insight into each refugee family's world through the use of "dialogic interviewing procedures and thematic interpretations" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 44). My goal was to capture a rich, thick description of the essence of each family's lived experiences with resettlement, and to present a thematic analysis of the phenomenon for Iraqi refugee families.

Introduction to Phenomenology

Phenomenology can be defined as "the study of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Smith, 2007, p. 188). It is the science of describing individual experience or one's way of "being-in-the-world" (Cerbone, 2008, p. 31). Phenomenologists seek to describe, not to explain or to analyze, the very essence of individuals' experiences with a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the aim of phenomenological qualitative research is to deal with experiences and meanings and to "capture as closely as possible the way in which the phenomenon is experienced within the context in which the experience takes place" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 27.)

Many types of phenomenology exist, as do many ways of conducting phenomenological research. I believe strongly in the ideals of interpretive or existential phenomenology and chose it as the guiding philosophy for my study. Furthermore, I chose to follow Thomas and Pollio's (2002) approach to conducting existential phenomenological research. One reason I chose to utilize Thomas and Pollio's (2002) approach to existential phenomenology, the tenets of which

are derived from Merleau-Ponty (1962), is because it focuses on the participants' perceptions of their experiences and accepts them as reality. In addition it allows the participants to be the experts, and the researcher to be the student of the lived phenomenon. The goal of the present study was to permit the participants in my study to inform me about what it was like for refugee families who have experienced resettlement in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States. Secondly, I chose existential phenomenology for practical reasons. Since I conducted this research as a student at a large university, and this was the approach used by faculty who conduct much of the phenomenological research at this university, it was convenient for me to take advantage of their expertise.

Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy on Existential Phenomenology

The lens that Thomas and Pollio (2002) chose to guide their approach to existential phenomenology was based on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). The philosophical ideals promoted by Merleau-Ponty emphasized the importance of focusing on an individual's lived experience, where he viewed phenomenology as a revolt against the positivist and reductionist viewpoint. He described phenomenology as giving "a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasized the perception of a human being's experience to give direct description rather than a causal explanation, and it follows a constructivist perspective.

Interrelatedness with the World

Merleau-Ponty (1962) placed great emphasis on the importance of the interrelationship of the individual and his or her world. He believed that there exists a world in which each individual is a part, and it is through living in this world that individuals come to learn about themselves (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). This concept of interrelatedness gives rise to several additional existential phenomenological ideas, such as (1) perception, (2) embodiment, and (3) intentionality.

- (1) *Perception* - Merleau-Ponty (1962) believed that individuals experience the world by perception and that each individual's perception is completely unique to him or her. Additionally, an individual's perception cannot be dissociated from varying contexts (e.g., historical timeframe, culture). Taken together, an individual's perception of his or her world as it is impacted by context constitutes that individual's truth or reality (Parker, 1994)
- (2) *Embodiment* - For Merleau-Ponty, the idea of embodiment was "a way of viewing persons as they are in their world within their body, which is consciously finding expression in feeling, speech, thought, sensing, judging, and so on" (Parker, 1994, p. 291). Because individuals are influenced continually by their body's position in the world, they can never be totally objective as researchers. Each individual sees the world differently, depending upon that person's own body and position in the world (Parker, 1994).
- (3) *Intentionality* - Merleau-Ponty (1962) referred to the term intentionality, not in the sense of planning or acting purposefully, but rather, he used this concept in reference to

peoples' relatedness to the world in which they have experiences. He believed that all human experience is directed toward certain objects, events, phenomena, and people, and the concept of intentionality emphasizes this directional nature. The objects and events that individuals are directed toward become those that are meaningful to them. In other words, "the objects that capture us, or that we seek out, reveal what is significant to us" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 14). As is the case with the concept of perception, the importance of context cannot be overlooked in the concept of intentionality. Thomas and Pollio (2002) denoted this importance when they described intentionality as "a general patterning of human experience which suggests that human life can only be understood as always and already in some context (as "being-in-the-world")" (p. 15).

Existential Grounds of Human Experience

Merleau-Ponty (1962) also described four existential grounds of human experience which consist of *body*, *others*, *time*, and *world*.

- 1) *Body* - The body is the central feature and is the fundamental category of human existence. The body is the primary source of experience for humans (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).
- 2) *Others* – Other people constitute human beings' network of relationships so they do not have to be alone. Humans exist in relationship to others and how they feel about these relationships affects peoples' perception of an experience.
- 3) *Time* - The element of time affects peoples' perception of their experiences. Change and continuity, limits and choices, or a fast or slow tempo are all qualities of time that are described as differently affecting peoples' experiences (Thomas and Pollio, 2002).
- 4) *World* - The world represents the physical surroundings in which one exists and this context has an impact on one's experience. Attributes of physical places can either be positive or negative and can impart either quality on an experience.

Overall, existential phenomenologists take the position that the lived experiences of each individual are bound in context and unfold against these four major existential grounds.

Background/Foreground

Finally, a goal of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) existential phenomenology is to decipher what stands out for a person with regard to his or her experience of a particular phenomenon by examining the foreground of a phenomenon for a person against the background (context). This is done through interviewing which is a method that builds a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant such that the dialogue between the two people provides a pathway to greater understanding. This dialogue allows for constant reciprocity and leads to collaboration between the researcher and the participant. The researcher does not assume to know about the participant's experience and instead becomes a "humble student" allowing the participant to be the "expert" on the phenomenon. Thus, the objective of this particular methodology is to learn what stands out from the background in a figural sense for the participant about an experience and use interpretive procedures to describe this phenomenon.

Interpretive or Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Thomas and Pollio (2002) subscribed to utilizing an interpretive process of phenomenology and the one on which they relied most extensively in their research approach was hermeneutic interpretation. This term is rooted in Greek mythology where Hermes was the messenger from the gods. Consequently, akin to Hermes, a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher will attempt to grasp the message and relay it the readers of his or her interpretation using the participants' own words to capture their lived experiences (Lopez & Williams, 2004). As a result, the researcher strives to send the message from the participants to the readers so they

can vicariously experience the life of the participants, or like Hermes, make visible the message to someone who has not experienced the phenomenon (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). This approach goes beyond description to look for meaning in the texts of interviews.

With this approach, the researcher acknowledges that participants' experiences are influenced by the context in which they occur, including the other people involved in participants' lives and the environments in which they live. Consequently, it is not possible to ascertain a universal truth or a universal experience of a phenomenon, but instead one version as applied to a particular context in which it occurs. An additional assumption to this approach is that the researcher must gain prior knowledge about a phenomenon from scholarly literature prior to undertaking the research, in order for him or her to be able to grasp the deeper meaning of the experience from the participants' narratives (Lopez & Williams, 2004).

Moreover, the followers of the interpretive approach do not believe that it is possible for researchers to completely eliminate their biases from influencing the study, but instead they attempt to make themselves conscious of them and acknowledge that they exist. As a result, the meanings that the researcher arrives at, referred to as "constitutionality", are a fusion of both the researcher's interpretations and the participants' experiences (Lopez & Williams, 2004).

Philosophically, interpretive phenomenology resonates strongly with me since my epistemology is in line with the existence of multiple realities dependent on the context in which a phenomenon is studied. Also, I am of the belief that it is impossible to completely remove oneself and neutralize one's beliefs when conducting qualitative research.

Phenomenology in Family Research

Since the objective of my study was to explore the essence of resettlement for Iraqi refugee families and not for individual refugees, I examined the lived experiences of this phenomenon from multiple perspectives in a family. In order to conduct phenomenological research from a family viewpoint, Dahl and Boss (2005) stressed that:

in family research, which has multiple perspectives, this means that we must either consider and describe diverse views, or explicitly label our work as restricted to one person's perspective of how a family or a couple operates. Either one is acceptable as long as it is labeled because the phenomenologist's focus is on *whose* perspective is represented at that time and in that context. (p. 64)

Similarly, Daly (2007) suggested that:

individual interviews can provide good insight into one person's experience of a developmental transition or a family event, whereas including couples and multiple members of families can provide insight into relationship dynamics, shared and conflictual viewpoints, and the multiple realities that constitute everyday family life. (p. 182)

Consequently, for this present study I considered multiple perspectives or views and described how Iraqi refugee family members experienced resettlement by interviewing at least two members from each family.

The Present Study

Acknowledgement of Personal Bias

With regard to acknowledgement of my personal biases, to reduce the likelihood of having introduced my own personal biases and presuppositions into my study and according to the tenets of phenomenology as recommended by Thomas and Pollio (2002), I underwent a bracketing interview that was conducted by my major professor. Bracketing (or epoche) is an interviewing process that encourages researchers to set aside their own experiences in order for the perspectives and the voices of informants to be clearly understood without being unduly affected by researcher expectations or preconceptions. During the bracketing interview, I was asked to provide accounts and descriptions of my own personal experiences with the phenomenon of resettlement. Additionally, bracketing also experientially informed me about the process of being interviewed. Subsequently, I analyzed my interview responses and reflected upon them. This technique assisted me in bringing my biases related to Iraqi refugees and their migration experiences to light and becoming aware of them to reduce, however not eliminate, the likelihood that I introduced them into my interviews and analysis.

As a result of reflecting on my responses to my bracketing interview the major issues and assumptions that emerged for me were: (1) potential conflicting attitudes or reactions arising from my being of the Jewish faith and many Iraqi refugees being of Arab descent and/or the Islamic faith, (2) my assumption that all refugees arrive in the United States with little or few financial assets and low levels of education, (3) my assumption that involuntarily migration is against one's will and that refugees would rather be in their homeland, (4) my assumption that excessive loss, loneliness, and isolation are experienced upon resettlement, (5) my assumption

that resettlement is difficult and requires much personal effort for success (6) existence of tug of war between relief of being safe and yearning for home for all refugees, (7) guilt over the predicament of Iraqi refugees and a sense of responsibility due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and (8) an excessive sense of empathy for refugees' plight.

Study Context

With regard to study context, I chose a refugee resettlement agency in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States to assist me in contacting families, for several reasons. First, at the time the study was proposed, the city had approximately 160 adult Iraqi refugees and approximately 40 families, according to a recent census conducted by the resettlement agency, and that number was expected to increase over the next year as additional Iraqi refugees resettled in the city. Second, the predominant mission of this agency was to provide the local Iraqi refugee community with ample opportunities to receive support services such as employment counseling and ESL education, partake in cultural, ethnic, and religious events and services, as well as bond with other refugees. Consequently, this site provided numerous potential study participants with varying ethnic and religious backgrounds, family demographics, and migration resettlement experiences. Finally, I had previously forged a relationship with this agency since I personally met with the executive director and ESL coordinator at the agency to discuss my research and the prospects of obtaining support from the agency. Additionally, I attended a "World Refugee Night" event in June of 2013 and 2014 and an English class for refugees offered through the agency in August of 2013 and 2014.

I also continued to serve as a volunteer English tutor through the agency for an Iraqi refugee family which I had begun in September of 2013. This family welcomed me into their

home and over these past 18 months I developed a friendship with each member of the family. My “immersion in the field” informed me as a researcher by providing me with firsthand exposure to Iraqi culture, as well as the process of early resettlement in the United States for Iraq refugee families. I became much more familiar with and educated about the “trials and tribulations” that Iraqi refugees must endure as they settle into their new life in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States. As a result of my efforts to connect, I established a rapport with and exposure to agency staff members and members of the Iraqi refugee community, as well as demonstrated a willingness to reach out and serve their community in an accommodating and trustworthy manner.

Inclusion Criteria

The research participants included members of Iraqi families who were 18 years of age or older and who had resettled in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States as refugees. The decision was made not to interview minors due to the potentially emotionally intense nature of experiences they would be asked to describe. This study only included adult participants because they were less vulnerable to psychological distress from talking about their experience and have more coping mechanisms to deal with the trauma that they may have experienced. Children may be at a higher risk for experiencing subsequent emotional distress than adults and are considered a vulnerable population by the Institutional Review Board. Additionally, by interviewing family members 18 years of age or older, some of who were children in the family, it was possible to obtain the essence of the resettlement experience for a family. Moreover, it was not just a procedural decision, but also an ethical one related to the principle that researchers should cause no harm or the least amount of harm possible to participants. Many of these children had already

been exposed to violent and fear provoking situations, thus I did not want to risk subjecting them to additional distress.

Participants were either native born or naturalized citizens of Iraq. For the purposes of this study, participants must have been granted refugee status by the U.S. government, but could have either migrated directly from Iraq to a mid-size southeastern city in the United States *via* primary migration or arrived from a refugee camp or other receiving country *via* secondary migration. Additionally, the Iraqi refugees must have lived in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States for no more than 3 years because I was primarily interested in refugees' more recent resettlement experiences. Furthermore, documentation in published literature described adjustment to a new culture as mostly complete within the first five years of resettlement (Keyes & Kayne, 2004). According to Stein (1986), after that time refugees no longer display very different characteristics from other inhabitants of their new homeland.

Participants also had to be willing to be interviewed privately with no other individuals present, except for myself and the interpreter, and to have their interviews audiotaped. They had to either be fluent in English or Arabic, and while Arabic was the primary language of the participants, the participants were given an option to be interviewed in either Arabic or English depending on which language they preferred.

Finally, since I was interested in the experiences of resettlement for Iraqi refugee families, at least two members of a family who migrated to the United States together and were co-residential at the time of the interview must have been willing to participate in order for the family to qualify for the study. I was willing to include varying dyadic and triadic relationships between family members such as husband-wife, parent-child, or sibling-sibling, since I was

interested in examining the phenomenon of resettlement for Iraqi refugee families from multiple perspectives. I selected participating families based on the responses I received, and with the goal of achieving maximum diversity in representation of families. A summary of the inclusion criteria for this study is summarized as follows:

- minimum of two members of a family that migrated together and were co-residential in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States
- minimum of 18 years-old
- spoke either English or Arabic
- native born or naturalized citizen of Iraq
- migrated either directly from Iraq *via* primary migration or from a bordering country *via* secondary migration
- resettled directly in a mid-size southeastern city in the United States for a maximum of 3 years prior to the beginning of the study
- entered the United States with refugee status
- willingness to be interviewed privately (but in the presence of an interpreter)
- willingness for interview to be audio recorded

Interpreters, Interpretation, and Translation

I utilized three different English-Arabic interpreters during the course of my study and each had three distinct roles. First, the primary interpreter made contact either in person or *via* telephone with all participants who expressed an interest in participating in my study.

Additionally, once she screened a family using the study inclusion criteria and deemed them eligible for the study, she scheduled the interviews for a mutually agreeable time and place for me, her, and each family. She was present during all of the in-person interviews and served as the interpreter for all participating families. According to Temple and Young (2004), the interpreter's perspective has the potential to influence her interpretation of the participants' responses and how she ultimately communicates them to me. Consequently, I have included my

interpreter's biographic information so the reader will be informed of the interpreter's potential introduction of bias into the data collection process.

The primary interpreter was identified by the executive director of the refugee resettlement agency after I asked the director to recommend competent and trusted interpreters that the staff used when working with their Iraqi client population. Thus, she came highly recommended from the resettlement agency, and was employed by them as an interpreter for their clients and was fluent in all dialects of Arabic spoken in Iraq and the surrounding Arab countries. She was also employed as an English-Arabic interpreter for a translating service for refugees and was familiar with most of the newly resettled Iraqi families in the local area.

The primary interpreter was 60 years old and born and raised in Baghdad. She had two adult daughters who lived in the United States and one adult son who lived in Baghdad. She left Iraq in 2008 and lived in the Middle Eastern country of Oman with her husband for 4 years before coming to a mid-size southeastern city in the United States in 2012 with her husband who had since passed away in 2013. Her daughter, who was a permanent resident of the United States, applied through Catholic Charities for her and her husband to be granted entrance to the United States as immigrants as opposed to coming with refugee status. She reported that the application process to gain entry into the United States seemed straight forward and simple to her. Her ethnicity was Armenian and she was a devoutly practicing Christian from a young age. She came from a wealthy family and learned to speak English at a young age since she spent her summers as a child visiting her aunt in England and was educated at an American missionary school in Iraq since the age of 13 years old. She was educated speaking both English and Arabic and did not continue her education past high school since she was married at 19 years old.

Prior to beginning the interviews with participants, I conducted a bracketing interview with the primary interpreter to identify any potential biases or preconceived impressions that she had about Iraqi refugees and resettlement. After analyzing her responses, I brought the issues to her attention so she could minimize the chances of introducing them into her interpretation of my or participants statements such that she would remain as neutral as possible. One of the most relevant issues was her feeling that Iraqi refugees were not as grateful as she would have expected them to be since she was an immigrant and did not receive all of the benefits that they did as refugees. Additionally, she mentioned that she felt that Iraqis tended to complain more than she thought was appropriate especially since they had been given the opportunity to live in the United States.

She also mentioned that she had only painful memories of living in Iraq, had always dreamed of living in the United States, and had the impression that it was a wonderful place to live where everything was simple and everyone was friendly and helpful. She described the fact that her husband, who had been educated and employed as an engineer in Iraq and Oman had to take a job working as a cashier in a local grocery store in the United States. When asked about her political affiliations and beliefs in Iraq she responded that she “never got into politics because it was really dangerous. If you want to live peacefully you just mind your own business.” Consequently, she revealed that she was not politically knowledgeable and did not get involved in any political discussions. Also, due to her self-proclaimed strong Christian faith and her frequent use of the term “blessing”, I reminded her that not all participants would share her same religious views, beliefs, and faith in God and to be mindful of such.

Second, I used a reliability interpreter to translate all of the written documents that were directly distributed to Arabic speaking participants from the English versions to Arabic versions. This interpreter was a native of Iraq, was of Arab ethnicity, and arrived in a mid-sized southeastern U.S. city with refugee status 2 years prior to the beginning of the study. She was a certified English-Arabic interpreter in Iraq, worked for the Iraqi government ministry as an English-Arabic interpreter, and taught an English language class to other Iraqi refugees in the community.

Third, I used a second reliability interpreter to translate the Arabic versions of written documents back into English versions. This second reliability interpreter also verified the accuracy of the primary interpreter's English-Arabic translations during the interviews by listening to a sampling of the audio-taped interviews. She was a native of Iraq, of Arab decent, of the Muslim faith, and arrived in a mid-sized southeastern U.S. city with refugee status 6 years ago. She had a college degree in mathematics from an Iraqi university, and worked as an English-Arabic interpreter for the resettlement agency, as well as a math tutor at a local community college. All three interpreters signed interpreters' pledges of confidentiality prior to commencement of recruitment.

I wrote the study recruitment flyer (Appendix A) in English first, then had it translated into Arabic by the first reliability interpreter, and then finally had the Arabic version back translated into English by the second reliability interpreter in order to assure that the intended meaning had been retained. I used this back translation process for the preparation of the initial telephone contact script (Appendix B) and the written informed consent form as well.

Recruitment

After filing an IRB application and receiving approval from the University IRB, I commenced with recruitment. Participant recruitment for this study was purposeful. The research participants were recruited from two sources which served as study gatekeepers to the Iraqi resettlement community in a mid-size southeastern city. The first gatekeeper was a refugee resettlement agency in this city. The executive director of this agency provided me with a letter of cooperation and agreed to allow me to recruit participants through the agency. Once I received approval for my research, I attended a staff meeting at the agency to introduce my research project, and then I requested the agency to notify appropriate refugees of the study, as well as to announce the study to refugees at various agency sponsored classes. The agency staff announced the title, objectives, and inclusion criteria of the study to potential participants and asked them if they gave their permission for the agency staff members to give me their contact information.

I also posted study recruitment flyers written in Arabic in the agency office reception area publicizing the study on announcement boards with my contact information. In addition, I attended an English language class offered by the agency during which time I announced my study to the Iraqi students in the class, as well as passed out the Arabic version of my study recruitment flyers to the interested students. At that time, I requested that any family interested in participating either let me know or contact the primary interpreter to screen for inclusion and set up an interview.

My second gatekeeper was the primary interpreter. She verbally discussed the study with local Iraqi refugee families who potentially qualified, and notified me of families who expressed interest in participating. The participants' familiarity with and trust of the interpreter and the fact

that she was present during all interviews facilitated some of the Iraqi refugees' interest in and acceptance of my role and my study.

As participants indicated their willingness to be interviewed and to share their experiences, and since most of them were not fluent in English, the primary interpreter contacted them by phone. During the initial phone call utilizing the Arabic version of the initial telephone contact script, the interpreter screened the participants making certain that the inclusion criteria for participant families were met and described the purpose and objectives of the study. If the family met the inclusion criteria, then she scheduled a mutually agreed upon time and location for the interview. Also, since the resettlement agency provided critical relocation services to the participants, it was clearly stated in all of the recruitment materials that their willingness to participate in the study would not affect their standing with the resettlement agency program. In addition, potential participant concern about coercion by resettlement agency staff and trusted members of the community was minimized. I did so by asking the staff at the resettlement agency and any referring community members to offer verbal reassurance to potential participants that their willingness to participate in the study would not affect their standing with the resettlement agency staff, access to their services, or their standing with trusted members of the community.

As I began to make contact with initial participants, I utilized a snowball sampling technique to identify additional potential participants for my study. Once families that volunteered were interviewed, they were asked to provide contact information for other Iraqi refugee families that they knew who qualified to participate, and gave their permission for me to contact them to ask them to participate in the study. I also asked an individual within the family

to contact the family that they thought might fit the inclusion criteria and tell them that they were being recommended for inclusion in the study. The individual also let the family know that I was going to be contacting them to give them more information and to find out if they may have been interested in participating. This sampling technique gave me access to participants who may have provided a more encompassing view of the phenomenon since, although they did not volunteer to participate, they consented if contacted and asked to do so (Blanton, 2013).

As a result of my recruitment techniques, I successfully identified participating families from several different sources. Two families were identified and volunteered to participate as a result of my announcement of my study at a resettlement agency English class. Four families were initially identified by the primary interpreter as ones who would qualify and were interested in participating, and one family was identified by snowball sampling. Consequently, these families may have represented diverse perspectives in the local Iraqi refugee community since they were solicited from various sources.

Participants

I interviewed three participants in three families and two participants in four families for a total of 17 family members who were key informants for seven families that met the inclusion criteria for participation in the study. I based this number of participants on the recommendations of phenomenological researchers who had repeatedly demonstrated that typically redundancy is evident and no new themes emerge after interviewing 6-12 participants (Morse, 1994; Ray, 1994; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The number of participants were adjusted as needed as the study proceeded until redundancy was evident. My goal was to have at least five families and 10

participants who completed the study, but I was flexible and accepted seven families and 17 participants in attempt to diversify my participants as much as possible.

The participants had to be over 18 years old, but I did not impose an upper age limit. The participants consisted of both men and women, of varying religious or ethnic background, were single, married, divorced or widowed, and with or without children. I did not set constraints on these participant demographics since I was interested in as diverse a population as possible to learn about the resettlement experience for Iraqi refugee families from varying stages of life and from various contexts.

The age of the participants ranged from 18-75 years old with the average age being 37 years old. There were nine female and eight male participants. The distribution of family roles represented among the participants was five child/siblings, one child/grandchild/sibling, eight parent/spouses, one grandparent/parent, one child/parent/spouse, and one parent. The distribution of the participants' marital statuses was six single, nine married, two widowed and one divorced. The participants' ethnicities consisted of one Kurdish, three Chaldeans, and 13 Arabs and their religions ranged from four Shiite Muslims, six Sunni Muslims, four unspecified Muslims, and three Christians. Participants reported their level of English language knowledge from no knowledge to 80%. The length of time that the participants had been living in the United States ranged from 40 days to 2 years. Thirteen participants migrated to the United States directly from Iraq and four participants came from Jordan. However, of the 13 who migrated directly from Iraq, five participants spent several years living in Syria prior to returning to Iraq and left directly from there to come here.

Additionally, a summary of key demographic information by family unit which includes all members of each family unit in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Key Demographics by Family

Family	# of Mem- bers	Time in U.S. (months)	Avg. yrs of education for adults	Ethnicity	Religion	Migration Pattern prior to U.S.
A	6	24	15	Arab/ Kurdish	Shia	Iraq to Jordan
B	6	1	15	Arab	Sunni/Shia	Iraq to Syria to Iraq
C	5	18	11	Chaldean/ Assyrian	Christian	Iraq
D	4	3	16	Arab	Sunni	Iraq to Syria to Iraq
E	4	9	16	Arab	Muslim	Iraq
F	7	8	13	Arab	Shia/Sunni	Iraq
G	3	2	14	Arab	Muslim	Iraq to Jordan

Pilot Interviews

I conducted two sets of pilot interviews in order to refine my interviewing technique using an interpreter and to practice conducting phenomenological interviews with multiple members of one family. My first pilot interview was with a 29 year old male Iraqi refugee who resettled in a mid-size southeastern city 3 months prior to the interview without any family members. I chose this participant for the initial pilot interview because he did not meet the inclusion criteria of migrating with another family member. This practice of choosing a participant who does not meet all the inclusion criteria of a study for the purposes of conducting a pilot interview is standard when a researcher desires to refine the data collection process, as well as insure that the process will be respectful of the participants' cultural practices (S.

Thomas, personal communication, March 4th, 2014). This interview was successful in accomplishing these goals.

In addition, I conducted the interview with the assistance of the primary interpreter to assess the feasibility of the interview process with a third party interpreter present. I instructed the interpreter as to the necessity of capturing the participants' actual words exactly as they were spoken without elaboration and relaying them to me in real time. She understood this point and did so moving forward. I realized that I would have to allow sufficient time for the translation process and scheduled interviews accordingly. With regard to cultural appropriateness, I confirmed with the interpreter that the majority of newly resettled Iraqi refugees would be willing to be interviewed under the conditions that I had prescribed if they chose to participate in the study.

After I received IRB approval, I conducted my second set of pilot interviews with an Iraqi refugee family who met my inclusion criteria. Prior to conducting these interviews, I reminded my interpreter of the importance of interpreting exactly what each participant said without offering any additional commentary or explanation. I also reviewed the tenets of phenomenological interviewing with her, including offering as few verbal and non-verbal reactions to participants' responses as possible so as to not lead participants in any particular direction. I conducted these interviews with three members from this family of five in their home. They had been living in a mid-size southeastern city for 1 year and 5 months at the time of the interview. I interviewed the 43 year old father, the 41 year old mother, and the 19 year old son in this family. I interviewed each family member privately and sequentially all during one visit. During the process of these interviews, the primary interpreter and I developed a refined

interviewing process whereby we became more familiar with each other's modes of communicating. I also gained the opportunity to improve my phenomenological interviewing skills and become more accustomed to conducting several intense lengthy interviews one after the other with multiple members of one family.

Data Collection

I interviewed each participant one time, with the exception of one participant, with whom I conducted a follow-up interview for the purpose of gaining additional in-depth descriptions of and clarification on issues that were raised during the initial interview. Consequently, I conducted a total of 18 interviews. The interview lengths ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 90 minutes and averaged 1 hour in length, but the length depended on how much information each participant wanted to share. All interviews were audio recorded in their entirety with a digital audio recorder, however no photographs or video recordings were taken. I interviewed each participant privately with the primary Arabic-English interpreter, and no other family member or friends were present in the room. The primary interpreter was present during all interviews to facilitate communications between me and the participants. I employed the same primary interpreter throughout the entire study for the sake of consistency and reliability as recommended by Twinn (1997) when conducting cross-cultural qualitative research. Although a minimum of two members of a family were interviewed, I did not share participants' answers with any family members.

All participants chose to respond entirely in Arabic during their interviews, except for one who was fluent enough in English that he chose to respond in both English and Arabic at various times during his interview. The interpreter successively translated from English to

Arabic and Arabic to English throughout the entire interview so I knew exactly what the participants' responses were in real time and asked clarifying questions accordingly. The primary interpreter used a hand signal to indicate to participants to pause during lengthy narratives so that she could relay their responses to me in manageable segments to ensure accurate interpretation of their replies. According to the existential phenomenological approach utilized for this study, the interviews were face-to-face, open-ended, and extremely unstructured. The interview began with the open-ended question "when you think about your family's experience of coming to live in the United States what stands out for you?" I used follow-up prompts and probes to explore topics or issues that the participant raised, to clarify precise meanings of words that the participants used, and to encourage elaboration of details as the participant shared his/her experiences. Some examples of follow up questions or comments were:

"Tell me more about that"

"What was most challenging for you about that?"

"Give me an example of that"

"Say more about that."

"What else stands out for you?"

"Describe what that was like for you."

At the conclusion of the interview, I orally asked the participants questions to obtain specific relevant demographic information such as the participant's current age, age at migration, number of family members resettled upon migration and their relationships and ages at migration, migration profile, employment status, occupation, level of education, marital status, off-spring status, ethnic and religious affiliation, and length of time residing in the United States

(Appendix C). Responses to these questions were audio recorded as well. All interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and, with the exception of one family, all participating members of a family were interviewed successively on the same day. After the conclusion of the interview when I was no longer in the presence of the participant, I recorded field notes which documented my reflections on and responses to the interview process and the participant and family, as well as my observations of the participant's behaviors and reactions during the interview. I also noted the seating arrangements prior to and during the interviews and appearance of the home and family members, in addition to the families' interactions before and after the interviews.

Since the digital recorder contained a built in USB port, after the conclusion of each set of interviews, the interviews were immediately transferred directly to my password protected computer for transcription and were not retained on the digital recorder. With regard to the transcription of the audio taped interviews, since the interviews were conducted with participants whose first language was Arabic utilizing an Arabic-English interpreter, I acknowledge that there were several options for converting the audiotaped interviews into written transcripts. Admittedly the optimal process would have been to have an Arabic-English interpreter transcribe participants' responses verbatim in Arabic and then have another interpreter back translate the Arabic transcripts into English. However, this option was not realistic from a financial and person power perspective since the expense of interpreters and transcriptionists and the complexity of the task due to the number and length of the interviews rendered this option cost and time prohibitive.

Alternatively, I personally transcribed all of the audiotaped interviews verbatim into English on a password protected computer using digital transcription software. Next, I checked the transcripts against the audio recordings to ensure that I transcribed them accurately. I transferred select audio files to the reliability interpreter (described in the interpreter section) *via* a secured Dropbox account. This one Dropbox account was directly privately linked only between me and the reliability interpreter, password protected, and could not be infiltrated by anyone other than the two of us. Next, the reliability interpreter checked three 5 minute segments distributed throughout the length of an interview from five different recorded interviews to verify that they were translated accurately. She did not report any significant differences in meaning from the interpretation offered by the primary interpreter on the audio tape. Additionally, I was confident in the accuracy of the primary interpreter's translation, because approximately ½ of the participants demonstrated a high enough level of English language listening comprehension skills to adequately understand the primary interpreter's translation of their responses and I did not observe them correcting her. Finally, the length of time the each participant responded approximately matched the length of the interpreter's translations.

All of the study data without identifying information, including transcripts, field notes, and demographic information, was organized according to participant and family in electronic files stored on my personal password protected computer. Once the audio recordings were verified by the reliability interpreter, they were deleted off of her password protected computer.

Setting

I gave the participants the choice of being interviewed in either their homes, a private conference room at the refugee resettlement agency office, or a private room in the Child and

Family Studies departmental building at the university. The participants had the option of choosing the setting depending on which was most convenient for and preferable to them. All of the participants chose to be interviewed in their homes. Since multiple members of each family were interviewed individually while other members of the family were present in the home, the family member being interviewed at any given time selected in which room in the home they preferred to be interviewed. I interviewed all of the male participants in the living room of their homes. However, I interviewed the female participants either in the living room, dining room, or bedroom, depending on which was most convenient for them or their family.

The participants' homes offered privacy, familiarity, and comfort for them, as well as providing them with the opportunity to be hospitable to guests which is a highly valued quality in Iraqi culture (Ghareeb et al., 2008). Additionally, by conducting the interviews in the participants' homes they had the freedom to schedule the interviews at any time that was convenient for the families, and not have to conform to the other venues' limited hours of operation. Consequently, for all of these reasons, the participants may have felt more at ease and secure which may have encouraged them to more readily offer rich descriptions of their experiences.

Data Analysis

Although there were other approaches, I conducted a thematic analysis of the data using the existential phenomenological methods described by Thomas and Pollio (2002). Although I used Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software for organizing and storing my audiotaped interviews and transcripts, as well as recording field notes from the interviews, I chose not use the software for the actual coding and analysis. Since I was analyzing the data by family and the

number of interviews were manageable, I decided it that is was more convenient and appropriate to analyze the data manually. Consequently, I coded the transcripts using Microsoft Word. I was the only researcher conducting the actual coding and analysis, however I consulted with my major professor and had her review the interview transcripts and my thematic analyses to insure that she supported my coding and analytical decisions. Additionally, as I transcribed the completed interviews in their entirety, during my initial coding or analysis, I attended phenomenological interpretive research group meetings at the university and presented four of my interview transcripts to gain additional perspectives and various interpretations of my data from other phenomenological research scholars who were unfamiliar with my study. Moreover, in the later stage of my analysis, I presented my final thematic structure to the group as well. Any transcripts shared with members of this research group for the purpose of data analyses had identifying information removed and each member of the group signed a research group member's pledge of confidentiality.

I analyzed the data in two phases. Since I was interested in exploring the essence of the resettlement experience for Iraqi refugee families, first I analyzed the interview transcripts within families, and then second across families. First, I identified commonalities within each family by examining the transcripts from each family member in a family for meaning units, themes, and patterns, while reflecting on the sense of the whole texts. I did this by identifying issues that more than one family member in each family spoke about. Then, I used that criteria to code for themes within families which were indicative of a shared perception or meaning for the family. After identifying predominant themes for a particular family, I grouped the participant's actual quotes, as meaning units, together under the themes that they supported. Next, I constructed a

narrative for each of the seven families which described the resettlement experience for each family. As I conducted the first round coding, I integrated my field notes from the interviews by memoing my evolving thoughts about the meaning of the data.

Second, I conducted the thematic analysis across families. I identified common subthemes that had emerged during my thematic analysis within the families. Next, I selected family members' actual phrases as meaning units, grouped them according to their commonalities, and assigned them to the representative subthemes that they supported. As my analysis evolved, I regrouped some meaning units and put them under different subthemes from which they were originally assigned. I formed subthemes as often as needed to accommodate new emerging ones. Next, I grouped subthemes that I deemed related into themes. I examined the meaning units that supported each theme and subtheme and chose a representative quote from each group to replace my initially identified theme and subtheme labels such that I used the family members' actual words to capture their lived experience.

After completing multiple rounds of coding to refine my themes and subthemes and reflecting on the meaning of the texts individually and as a group, I identified an overall common thread and chose a title in the form of a direct quote from a participant that reflected the common and accurate experience for all families. Finally, I constructed a thematic structure through a narrative that described how the themes interrelated to each other to convey the meaning, to the participants, of experiencing resettlement in the United States as Iraqi refugee families.

Although, I initially examined interview transcripts to identify themes and constructed a thematic structure within each family, the following results presented in Chapter 4 include the themes and a thematic structure emerging from my analysis across families exclusively.

Trustworthiness/Credibility

With regard to insuring the trustworthiness of my study, in addition to other strategies that I have mentioned previously, I also incorporated further strategies into my study for this purpose. Because a participant may have felt inhibited about talking about his or her experiences in the presence of other family members, I conducted the interviews with each participant in private without other family members present. I also informed all participants that I would not share their answers with any other family members. This gave the participants opportunities to speak freely without the concern of feeling constrained, judged, or that there would be repercussions as a result of what they had shared with me. As I result, I hoped to obtain more trustworthy data that accurately reflected the refugee families' experiences.

Another crucial consideration for the credibility of this study's results was to control for researcher consistency as much as possible. I was the only researcher with which the participants were in contact during the length of the study with the exception of the primary interpreter. Since this study involved a population that may have been in vulnerable contexts in the past where their safety was threatened, it was essential that I was able to build trust and rapport between myself and the refugees. If they did not trust me, than the credibility and trustworthiness of the results could have been compromised because they may not have felt secure enough to disclose their experiences honestly. My immersion in the field over the past 1½ years was an asset in terms of my ability to more readily gain the trust of the participants, as well as assist me in having a more informed frame of reference for understanding the experiences that participants shared with me. Additionally, I believe that my study findings are transferable to other Iraqi refugee families who have experienced resettlement in other locations in the United States since

the participant sample was drawn from recently resettled refugees who migrated either directly from Iraq or bordering countries.

Furthermore, during my analysis phases, I participated in the university phenomenological interpretive research group in order to get feedback from experienced researchers in various disciplines that were impartial to my research topic. As a result, the members of the group were able to offer me competing interpretations of my data which assisted me in maximizing the accuracy of my understanding and resultant conclusions. Moreover, I continuously engaged in personal reflexivity throughout the entire research process, from the conducting of observations and interviews through the data analysis and report writing, by carrying out reflective memoing. I was conscious of my personal biases and presuppositions that emerged from my bracketing interview so as to prevent them from entering into and skewing my research findings. Finally, I constantly referred back to my data as I proceeded with my analysis and conclusion drawing to ensure that my findings were truly reflective of the participants' experiences and not how I understood or expected them to be.

Ethical Considerations

In order to protect the rights of my participants I first obtained approval to conduct my study from the university IRB before beginning participant recruitment. After recruitment, every participant was informed of the nature of this research project during the initial screening phone call which was conducted by the primary interpreter. This contact involved utilizing a predetermined script in Arabic that was to be used without modification. Though a description of the project was provided in the study advertisement flyer, the same information was shared verbally during the phone conversation.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were provided with a copy of the informed consent form in Arabic that provided an overview of the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, and rights of voluntary participation and confidentiality. I reviewed the informed consent form in-depth with the prospective participants with the assistance of the primary interpreter. Also, during this time each prospective participant had the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, and clarify issues regarding the study. If a participant decided not to participate, I thanked that person for his/her time, and assure him/her that his/her refusal to take part would have no negative effects for the individual or affect his/her standing with the resettlement agency. Only one potential participant chose not to participate because she deemed that the risk was too high for her.

When a potential participant decided to participate in the study, she/he indicated this by signing the consent form. Alternatively, participants were given the option of expressing their verbal permission that was to be audio recorded. However, no one chose this option. The option to give verbal permission was offered to potential participants because it was possible that there may have been a reluctance on the part of some refugees to sign documents due to concerns arising from previous experiences. Consequently, this option was designed to reduce the sense of jeopardy some potential participants may have perceived by signing forms. All potential participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form. All consent forms with identifying information were stored in my major professor's office in a locked filing cabinet.

In addition, I assured the participants of confidentiality except in the case of their disclosure of child abuse or neglect or the intention to harm self or others. For those exceptions, I

apprised them of my legal duty to inform authorities and ask them to consent to such in writing prior to beginning participation in my study. In order to assure that confidentiality was maintained, the list of participants' names was stored separately from their interview data in a locked filing cabinet in my major professor's office. Only pseudonyms were associated with interview data once the tapes were transcribed. All interview transcripts were stripped of any potentially identifying information before I shared them with anyone. Finally, the reliability interpreters and I used only password protected computers and software in order to insure that confidentiality of the participants was maintained.

If the interview elicited emotionally laden experiences and memories, it was possible that participants may have experienced some distress after the interview. Consequently, I provided participants with a list of personnel at the resettlement agency, their specific roles, and their contact information, as well as contact information for low cost mental health providers in the community that served the local refugee population. Participants could contact these resources to help them process the after-effects if they felt the need or wish to do so. The staff at the resettlement services agency was also available to assist participants with making contact with mental health providers. Finally, at the conclusion of the interview each participant was presented with a \$10.00 Walmart gift card for appreciation of his/her time. The participants received the gift card whether they chose to complete the entire interview or not.

Self-Care Measures

Due to the emotionally intense nature of the subject matter in this research study, I acknowledge that I needed to engage in measures to manage my compassion fatigue and subjective responses to the material to which I was exposed (Rager, 2005). One measure I used

was to conduct a maximum of three interviews per day to allow myself adequate time for reflection and debriefing. Another measure I employed to unburden myself and process my emotional reactions to listening to the participants' stories was to consistently carry out journaling throughout the course of the study. An additional measure that I took was to speak with my major professor and peer researchers about my reactions and feelings that had been evoked as a result of my conducting this research. Finally, I engaged in relaxation techniques such as yoga and deep breathing, as well as attended to participating in self-care and life enjoyment activities to strike a balance between work and personal life.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

Stories shared by the participants from these seven families provided extremely rich and descriptive contributions to the understanding of the Iraqi refugee families' lived experiences with resettlement in the United States. Because the family was the unit of analysis for describing and interpreting the findings, the presentation of the results begins with a contextual description of each family. Next, common themes that emerged which conveyed the lived experiences of resettlement for these families. Finally, a thematic structure of the relational experiences of resettlement for the families is offered.

Contextual Description of Families

In order to present a fuller picture of the seven families which were included in the present study, a brief description of the contextual factors and backgrounds for each of these families is provided in this section. Family demographics such as age, gender, and relationships of family members, as well as other contextual factors, such as employment status, educational level, migration history, level of English language knowledge, and ethnic and religious affiliation are presented, but altered or omitted so families cannot be easily identified.

Family A: Heidar and Fatima

Family A consisted of six family members, Heidar, 43, and Fatima, 38, who were husband and wife, and their four children, a 17-year-old daughter, a 15-year-old son, a 12-year-old daughter, and a 4-year-old son. Heidar and Fatima were the informants for this family and were interviewed in their home. The data represented the perspectives of both spouses/parents in this family as shared in individual interviews. While the entire family were practicing observant Shiite Muslims, Heidar was of Arab ethnicity and Fatima was of Kurdish decent. Both

informants spoke fluent Arabic. However, while Heidar had a slight knowledge of English, Fatima had a greater command of English than her husband. This family was originally from Bagdad and left Iraq 5 years ago to live in Jordan for 3 years. They then left Jordan and had been living in the United States for 2 years prior to the interviews.

Heidar had earned a bachelor's degree in military science in Iraq and was employed in the military for his entire career until he suffered a debilitating incident 9 years ago. Fatima graduated high school and completed one year of college in Iraq, however she had never been employed outside of the home. Neither of them had been employed since they had been living in the United States due to disability and familial responsibilities. This family lived in a private apartment complex, but received section eight housing and social security disability insurance benefits, and were the only family in the present study to receive such benefits.

This family appeared very close knit, devoted to, and supportive of one another. While Heidar focused on his medical treatment and recovering from his injuries, Fatima admitted to being the pillar of strength and the one responsible for taking care of every member of the family including her husband and children. This family strongly relied on their religious faith and devotion to Islamic practices in order to cope with stress associated with Heidar's medical disability. Also, although Heidar and Fatima followed traditional gender roles in their family, due to Heidar's disability and inability to work outside the home, the couple operated as cooperative allies working together closely as a team compensating for each other's weaknesses. Since this family's primary reason for resettling in the United States was for Heidar to receive advanced medical treatment, while he seemed resolved to committing to living here permanently and becoming a U.S. citizen, Fatima was more ambivalent and unsure about her family's future

as to where they would ultimately permanently settle. While the children were continuing to adjust to this new culture successfully, generally this family felt isolated and disconnected from other close family and friends in Iraq.

Family B: Abraham, Mika'il, and Riad

Family B consisted of six family members, Abraham, 54 and his wife, 52, and their four sons, Mika'il, 25, Riad, 23, a 15-year-old, and a 13-year-old. Abraham, Mika'il, and Riad were the informants from this family and were interviewed in their home. The data represented the perspectives of two generations as parent/spouse and child/sibling in this family as shared in individual interviews. While the entire family was of Arab decent, Arbahim and his sons were Sunni Muslims, but his wife was a Shiite Muslim. All three informants were fluent in Arabic. While Abraham and Mika'il had moderate knowledge of English, Riad had less knowledge of English than his father and older brother. The family was originally from Bagdad and left Iraq to live in Syria for 2½ years. They then returned to Iraq to live for some time under duress and separated from each other. They ultimately arrived in the United States 40 days prior to the interviews that were conducted.

Abraham had some college education in mechanical engineering, but did not complete his degree in Iraq due to financial reasons. He was employed as a shop owner for mechanical spare parts in Iraq. Mika'il had earned a bachelor's degree in communications engineering in Iraq and was employed as a communications engineer there. Riad had completed one year of college studying business in Iraq prior to leaving to come to the United States. None of the informants for this family were employed in the United States at the time of the interviews. This family lived in an unsubsidized private apartment complex.

This family had directly experienced numerous and extensive traumatic events in Iraq, so they had arrived in the United States physically and emotionally stressed and exhausted. Several members of the family had medical issues that required treatment and these needs, along with their concerns about their ability to financially support themselves, were in the forefront for them. They were particularly overwhelmed about the demands placed on them to obtain employment in order to meet their needs so “early” after their arrival to the United States and without having any time to “rest and recover” from their ordeal in Iraq. Their apprehension over these issues seemed to overshadow the sense of physical safety they had acquired by coming to live in the United States. This family also expressed great concern over the potential lack of employment opportunities afforded to the eldest sons Mika’il and Riad even though they had either completed or were in the process of completing college degrees. Even through all that they had survived, they were a close knit family that valued being together and were grateful for the opportunity to leave Iraq.

Family C: Salma, Muneer, and Jawsa

Family C consisted of five family members, Salma, 75, her son Muneer, 53 and his wife, 54, and their two sons, Jawsa, 24, and a 21-year-old. Salma, Muneer, and Jawsa were the informants for this family and were interviewed in their home. The data represent the perspectives of three generations, as parent/grandparent, child/parent/spouse and child/sibling/grandchild in this family as shared in individual interviews. All the members of this family were of Chaldean ethnicity except for the wife who was Assyrian, and all were practicing Christians who were Catholic in Iraq, but attended an evangelical church in the United States. This was the only family in the present study that was represented by three generations and were

of the Christian faith. All three informants were fluent in Arabic. However, Salma had no knowledge of English, while Jawsa had a limited knowledge, and Muneer had the highest level of English knowledge reporting at 60%. This family was originally from Bagdad, migrated directly from Iraq, and arrived in the United States 1½ years prior to the interviews.

While Salma had only an elementary school education and had never worked outside of the home in Iraq or the United States, her son, Muneer, had an associate's degree in mechanical drawing, served in the Iraqi military for 10 years, and also worked as a mechanic. In the United States he had been working as a robotics operator in an automobile parts factory for 8 months. His son, Jawsa, graduated from high school in Iraq and had worked numerous jobs, such as repairing computers, as a carpenter, and as a blacksmith prior to coming to the United States. At the time of the interview, he was employed as a chef. The family lived in an unsubsidized private apartment complex.

The members of this family, including Muneer's wife and other son, all worked extended hours at physically demanding jobs in order to adequately financially support themselves and meet their daily needs. As a result of their long work hours and conflicting work schedules, they did not have much leisure time to spend together as a family with the exception of attending church. This family had experienced a pronounced sense of isolation from other families and Iraqi Chaldean Christians, contributing to a sense of loss of their roots in that group since arriving in the United States. However, they did find great comfort by regularly attending church services and Bible study groups. Since Salma, had no knowledge of English and was not employed outside of the home, she experienced the greatest sense of boredom and isolation while most of her other family members were out of the home either working, attending English

class, or socializing with friends. She, as a widow for many years, also expressed the greatest initial hesitation about leaving Iraq and coming to the United States even though this family faced physical danger and religious persecution while living in Iraq.

Family D: Ali and Venus

Family D consisted of four family members, Ali, 43, and Venus, 34, who were husband and wife, and their two daughters, 8- and 6-years-old respectively. Ali and Venus were the informants for this family and were interviewed in their home. The data they shared during individual interviews represent the perspectives of both spouses/parents in this family. This family was of Arab ethnicity and while they identified as Sunni Muslims, they were not strictly observant. Both Ali and Venus spoke fluent Arabic. However, both had a moderate command of English and reported 50% comprehension level, although Ali more readily responded in English than his wife. This family was originally from Bagdad and left Iraq 9 years ago to live in Syria for 2 years, after which time they returned to Iraq and lived there for 7 more years before arriving in the United States 3 months prior to the interviews.

Ali had a bachelor's degree in cinematography and had worked as a photographer, photo journalist, and cinematographer in Iraq. Venus had a bachelor's degree in art education and had worked as a high school teacher in Iraq. Neither had been employed in the United States as of the time of their interviews. This family arrived in the United States with special immigration visa status as a result of Ali's prior service with the U.S. government in Iraq and was the only family in the present study to have such status. They lived in an unsubsidized private apartment complex.

The main reason that this family chose to leave Iraq and come to live in the United States, in addition to escaping the danger, was to seek treatment for Venus's increasingly debilitating medical condition. While Ali was initially enthusiastic about his family's resettlement in the United States, he was becoming increasingly less confident and more concerned about his ability to financially support his family. Venus, on the other hand, was not eager to leave their home and family behind in Iraq. Both Ali and Venus expressed doubt about their decision to choose to come and live in the United States and disappointment about the benefits provided since their arriving. This family, including their young children, were struggling to acclimate to the new culture, to learn the new language, and to feel an emotional sense of safety even though they had a sense of increased physical safety since coming to live here. Both Ali and Venus were also struggling with the loss of their social statuses that they had achieved as a result of their former careers in Iraq.

Family E: Ahmed and Rasha

Family E consisted of 4 family members, Ahmed, 29, and Rasha, 27, who were husband and wife, and their two daughters, 4-years-old and 3-months-old respectively. Ahmed and Rasha were the informants for this family and were interviewed in their home. The data represents the perspectives of both spouses/parents in this family. This family was of Arab ethnicity and while they both identified as Muslims, neither one was willing to disclose which, if any sect of Islam they practiced. Both Ahmed and Rasha spoke fluent Arabic. Ahmed had a strong command of English and often lapsed into responding in English during the interview, while Rasha knew a moderate amount of English, but less than her husband. This family was originally from Bagdad, migrated directly from Iraq, and arrived in the United States 9 months prior to the interviews.

Ahmed and Rasha both had bachelor's degrees in tourism and hotel management, and while Rasha had never worked outside of the home in Iraq, Ahmed had worked in numerous positions such as in security, service management, and as a site manager in advertising. Since arriving in the United States, Rasha had not been employed, but Ahmen was employed in a bakery for 3 weeks and then obtained a position as quality control auditor in an automobile parts manufacturing factory. He had been promoted to positions of increasing responsibility since he had worked at this job for 5 months. This family lived in an unsubsidized private apartment complex.

While Ahmen seemed extremely optimistic about all aspects of his and his family's resettlement and expressed that he was fulfilling his "dream of a lifetime" by coming to live in America, his wife was much less passionate about leaving her home and family in Iraq to start a new life in the United States. Although Rasha acknowledged the support offered by her husband since they had been in the United States, she visibly described the pain of the loss she had experienced by leaving her family behind in Iraq. While they both admitted to leaving their distress and anxiety about the violence that they were exposed to in Iraq, Rasha was also initially frightened of people in her new community based on preconceived images and impressions and a mistrust of humanity. This family had high hopes for an improved future for their young children and were the only family in the present study to have had a baby after they arrived in the United States. Thus, this family was continuing to adapt the changes incurred by moving to a new culture and raising a new born baby and a young child without the support of their extended family, while also readjusting to changes in gender roles as Ahmen took on more childcare responsibilities than he ever had when they were living in Iraq.

Family F: Sabah, Sarah, and Miral

Family F consisted of seven family members, Sabah, 49 and her husband, 59, and their five children, a 29-year-old daughter, a 25-year-old son, Sarah, 24, Miral, 19, and a 17-year-old daughter. Sabah and her daughters, Sarah and Miral, were the informants for this family and were interviewed in their home. The data represent the perspectives of two generations as parent/spouse and child/sibling in this family as shared in individual interviews. While the entire family was of Arab decent, Sabah was a Sunni Muslim, but her husband and children were Shiite Muslims. All three informants were fluent in Arabic. However, Sabah had no knowledge of English, while Sarah had an extensive knowledge of English, reporting at 80%, and Miral had a moderate knowledge of English, reporting at 60%. Even though Sarah and Miral understood quite a lot of English, both of them responded almost exclusively in Arabic. This family was originally from Bagdad, migrated directly from Iraq, and arrived in the United States 8 months prior to the interviews.

Sabah only had an elementary school education and had never worked outside of the home in either Iraq or in the United States. Sarah had earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in Iraq and was employed as an assistant mechanical engineer for the government. Once in the United States, she worked in a housekeeping position for 3 months until she became physically disabled. She was currently studying to prepare for the GED. Miral was in her last year of high school when she left Iraq so she did not graduate and was currently studying to prepare for the GED as well. She had not been employed in the United States at the time of the interviews. This family lived in an unsubsidized private apartment complex.

With the exception of Sabah, this family viewed coming to live in the United States as an opportunity to leave their uncertainty, fear, and unstable lives in Iraq in exchange for a more peaceful and safer way of life offering prospects for an improved future. While the other family members wanted to remain in the United States and continue to pursue improving their own personal situations, as well as that for the entire family, Sabah was in opposition to this arrangement. She consistently expressed strong disagreement with her family's wishes which created a source of conflict between her and the rest of the family. This family expressed distress over leaving other family and friends behind as well as being unsure of their status and conditions. They also experienced a sense of loss over the time and energy invested in the children's education which was not serving them advantageously in securing lucrative and high status employment in the United States as had been the case for them in Iraq. This family was the largest one in the present study and because it had the largest number of adult members, they collectively felt enormous pressure to support each other emotionally and financially.

Family G: Mona and Lobna

Family G consisted of three family members, Mona, 45, and her two children, her 18-year-old daughter, Lobna, and her 7-year-old son. Mona and Lobna were the informants for this family and were interviewed in their home. The data represent the perspectives of two generations as parent and child/sibling in this family as shared in individual interviews. Mona was widowed from her first husband, who was Lobna's father, and divorced from her second husband who fathered her son. While the entire family was of Arab decent and both Mona and Lobna identified as Muslims, neither one affiliated with any particular sect of Islam. Both informants were fluent in Arabic. Mona spoke with an Iraqi accent, and Lobna spoke with a

Jordanian accent. While Lobna had extensive knowledge of English reporting at 80%, Mona had significantly less knowledge of English reporting at 35%. This family was originally from Bagdad and left Iraq 17 years ago to live in Jordan. They then left Jordan to come to live in the United States 2 months prior to the interviews.

Mona had earned a bachelor's degree in social work in Iraq and worked for many years in both Iraq and Jordan teaching various subjects, including geography and sign language. Her most recent position was as an Arabic instructor at a university in Jordan. Lobna had graduated from high school in Jordan and was attempting to secure financial support to attend college in the United States. Neither of the informants for this family were employed in the United States at the time of the interviews. This family lived in an unsubsidized private apartment complex.

This family had lived for an extended time in Jordan after leaving Iraq and before coming to the United States, so only Mona had personal experience with and memories of the violence and war in Iraq from years earlier. Consequently, this family's primary reason for leaving Jordan was not related to escaping from terror and threats to personal safety, but instead was for Lobna to pursue her education and earn an advanced degree from an American university. This family was extremely optimistic about their opportunity to come to the United States to build a new life and generally reported having had positive experiences with everyone who had assisted them on their journey and once they had arrived here.

Since this family was from a metropolitan area and familiar with navigating an urban environment, they did not feel restricted by relying on public transportation, but instead comfortably navigated their way around the bus system. This was the only family in the present study in which the primary wage earner and caregiver was widowed and divorced. As a result,

although Mona was accustomed to managing the responsibility of being both a mother and a father to her children, Lobna also often filled the role of “mother” for her younger brother in Jordan when their mother was working. In the United States, Lobna served as English interpreter for her family since her English language knowledge was quite extensive, so much so that she passed an English language evaluation exam which qualified her to be admitted with international student status to a university in the United States.

Familial Themes for Resettlement

The themes and subthemes summarized in Figure 3 and presented below are those that emerged to capture the essence of the resettlement transition for the Iraq refugee families included in the present study. Since this study used the family as the unit of analysis, the analyses and presentation of themes were not exhaustive and did not include describing themes that emerged to describe the resettlement experiences of individuals. Since the objective of this study was to ensure that all families’ voices were heard, some themes were not necessarily revealed across all families, but were included because they strongly represented some families’ experiences. Additionally, I have chosen not to refer to participants by their pseudonyms when presenting supporting quotes for each theme, but instead refer to them only by their role in their family in order to preserve the anonymity of family members interviewed in this study.

“WE CAME FROM DEATH”/“A NEW LIFE FOR ME AND MY FAMILY” (Leaving Danger for Safety)

“If there is a stone it will crack”

All of the families described experiencing some form of personal danger and terror in their homeland of Iraq as a result of political violence. While some families left Iraq and directly came to the United States to resettle, other families left Iraq either temporarily or permanently to

“WE CAME FROM DEATH”/“A NEW LIFE FOR ME AND MY FAMILY”
<i>“If there is a stone it will crack”</i>
<i>“Any minute anyone can hear the news”</i>
<i>“We feel the safety and the peace”</i>
“WE LEFT EVERYTHING”
<i>“It's hard to say goodbye”/“It's not like the life we used to live”</i>
<i>“We're leaving them in that place”</i>
<i>“I cannot get the jobs I used to get”/ “I have to start all over again”</i>
<i>“My purse is empty”/ “How are we going to pay?”</i>
“NOW WE HAVE HOPE”/“WHAT FUTURE DO WE HAVE?”
<i>“It was like a dream for us”</i>
<i>“When we came here I feel all I did is nothing”/“I had something different on my mind”</i>
<i>“Once we come to the States she'll be healed”</i>
““CAN WE HELP YOU? DO YOU NEED ANYTHING?”/“THE ASSISTANCE FOR US AS REFUGEES IS VERY LITTLE”
<i>“We felt welcomed”/“From Iraqis you don't get any help”</i>
<i>“They are nice people, church people”</i>
<i>“The organization took care of us as if we were a golden medal”</i>
<i>“The help we get is not what we thought we'd get”</i>
<i>“No one is taking care of this thing”</i>
“WE TRUST GOD WITH OUR LIFE”
<i>“This is what God allowed”</i>
<i>“‘What are your beliefs? What is your denomination?’”</i>
“THE FAMILY IS OUR BACKBONE”
<i>“We had to unite”</i>
<i>“He has no one but me, so we got closer”</i>
<i>“He calls me mom”/ “Paying back to them”</i>
“WHAT WILL THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?”/“WE CAME TO THE UNKNOWN”

Figure 3. Summary of Family Themes and Subthemes

live in bordering countries before resettling in America. In other cases, these families described either witnessing or being subjected to various forms of violence day in and day out (directly and indirectly) which eventually convinced them that their lives were in too much peril and that they would be better off if they left Iraq and tried to build a new life in a host country such as the United States. Families described enduring violence which included robbery, kidnapping, shootings, and bombings. Some of the families experienced targeted terrorization and persecution as a direct result of their religious sect or faith. Some family members described and/or exhibited visible effects by way of suffering physical and emotional health issues as a result of their exposure to the violence or their stress related to fear for their own and other family members' safety.

One mother/wife described how much mistrust the violence in Iraq created. She would not allow her children out of her sight to due to the threat of violence. "I didn't like to let them go out to play....Because of the situation, Iraq is not stable. We cannot let our kids go and play outside because they can kidnap them, they can be in a bombing."

The older son in another family similarly described the dangerous and violent conditions in which they had lived in Iraq.

We lived in a very dangerous area in Bagdad. Maybe in the most dangerous and every day we would see people killed...Every day we used to go to school and lose some of our friends from school and our teachers were killed and there was no studying. Everything was a mess.

His father also described the extent of the violence in Iraq and how it threatened his and his family's safety in Iraq.

For the last 40 years there have been a lot of problems in my country and that gave us the impression that my life and my family's life and my children's future is always going to be in danger...My children in Iraq...if they went to shop or they went to see their friends that made me worry very much because you don't know any minute a car would explode near them and that made me worry. And this happened a lot and they were very close to the bombings.

Additionally, the grandmother/mother in this family described their fear and constant danger when living in Iraq and that the danger prompted them to leave.

In Iraq it was fear. Fear from the bombing, from the explosions, from anything like that... We'd leave home and if we go shopping there would be bombings and we used to worry 'How are we going to go and shop?' Always in the shopping area there were bombings. We worried also about our children when they used to go to school. Even near the schools there were bombings...Because of the situation we were in, I liked to come here because we were in a very hard situation.

A father/husband in another family who experienced extensive personal danger and terrorization described the extreme stress that he endured in Iraq.

Before coming here we were in... a very difficult situation. Any minute you don't know what group of criminals would just get into your house and sometimes I wouldn't sleep at night. I was so worried that anyone would just get in and take me or my children. So that was too much stress and fear.

This family's second son expressed relief from the danger in Iraq for his family. "We came from death as a family. All of us in the family, we were happy to come out of fear from death and

danger and fear.” He went on to say “when I left Iraq, I decided that I will never get back there and I wish that I can get something that will make me forget all of the hard times we saw there, that will make us forget all the past and start a new future.” This family’s oldest son said “I had from the beginning decided that I was not staying in Iraq. Living there is very disgusting. It's hard to say, but life there is disgusting.” He also described how difficult it was for his family to make the decision to leave their homeland, but that they felt forced to do it to save their lives and that there was no other choice for them.

I have my close family with me and we are safe...No one wants to leave his country, but we had to. We just had to do this, make this decision and we came. It's just like someone is buying their life...Every day you are threatened to be killed or...your close family, like your parents or your brothers will be killed any minute, of course you would just want to leave...to a safer place...Of course anyone would want to go.

A daughter/sister in another family similarly described that the threat to their lives in Iraq was what prompted her family to leave their homeland.

There were bombings and killings and...we felt we're not safe at all...Life in Iraq- everything was chaos, out of order...Always there were bombings and people dying around you and suddenly you hear that your neighbor is killed...We thought that we'd be killed at the hands of people who don't deserve life so we just left.

Her sister also stated that due to the dangerous conditions they were living under “it was very hard at the beginning, but the thing is that we had to leave. We had to leave Iraq.”

The father/husband in another family described the danger his family had faced being of the Christian faith in Iraq due to the religious persecution against them.

The religious problems between Muslims and Christians, Sunni and Shia and we were afraid that one of the days...someday that it would be so bad that they would persecute the Christians and kill them and this is what happened recently in Iraq. And this is what happened in Mosul...They killed and emptied Mosul from any Christians. They made them leave their houses and they stole all from them what they had, money and gold. So this could have happened any time and this had made me worry all the time.

His son also discussed the family's vulnerability to danger and threats due to their Christian faith, and that his father recognized their potentially deadly situation so he asked their family if they were in agreement about leaving Iraq.

The biggest reason we came was because we were Christians and where we lived, from all of my friends, I was the only Christian and we were persecuted and now what's happening in Iraq, they're persecuting the Christians... And this was my dad who thought about this...Because he cared for us, he took our opinion and asked us all 'Do you think this is a good thing to do? Do you want us to go?' And we all said 'yes.' And we decided to come to a place where we are safer.

When one father/husband, who was severely injured by American military gunfire in Iraq and whose face was not recognizable even to himself, returned home from the hospital, his injuries affected his family greatly, especially his eldest daughter. The father stated that "My younger daughter would stand from far and look at me because she wouldn't recognize me. She was scared and...my oldest daughter, since then she started having seizures and emotionally she became not well."

Another father/husband also described the mental and physical toll taken on his wife as a result of her stress due to the threat to his safety in Iraq.

Because of the places I worked in, the dangerous places,...she was so worried about me, she had a disease that was in the bones. It's a kind of arthritis disease, a rare thing and when we read about it - the doctor said this is because of worrying and stress...After that, once it starts, it gets more complicated...Sometimes in the morning, she'll wake up with her fingers crooked and not moving.

Another father/husband described the physical and emotional toll that his family's terrorizing experiences took on his wife.

When I came out from being hostage and we met and we went to Syria, my wife was like fire coming out of her, but she couldn't do anything...She was a teacher in the University of XXXXXX. She is an engineer, but she lost her job because of the situation and because she became sick and she couldn't keep up...She was stressed and started forgetting things from all the stress that was in her life...She cannot take anything. She is very tired and sick emotionally.

His son also described the physical and emotional toll that the stress from the danger in Iraq had imparted on him and his parents.

When we came here I worried about my parents because...my mother is already very sick before coming, and my dad is very tired, and even at the health screening in Iraq before coming here, when I looked at my parents I felt that they are gone. They are very tired and even here I look at them and I worry about them...I worry about my mother because she thinks a lot and worries a lot and my dad too. They think a lot and worry a lot and this

can kill them. This can kill people, this kind of stress...And even I, because I keep thinking and worrying and being stressed, I went to the doctor and he told me that my hair, I lost my hair just because of stress.

This father/husband summarized the extreme nature of the stress on he and his family associated with the violence they had endured by saying “If there is a stone it will crack. How can a human being take all of this?”

“Any minute anyone can hear the news”

As a result of the extreme nature of the threatening situations that most of these families had been exposed to on a constant basis in Iraq, they described having had feelings of vulnerability and persistent anxiety with regard to their family members’ safety and whereabouts whenever they left their homes in Iraq. They described having had constant anticipation about receiving bad news about a family member and how vitally important it was to be able to be in contact with each other *via* cell phone or in person to be able to be reassured that their loved ones were safe, particularly immediately after a bombing incident. Most families described having experienced overwhelming panic and fear if they were unable to obtain word about other family members’ safety. This extreme concern and ever-present vigilance over family members’ safety and whereabouts was not limited to just parents for their children, but was also extended to children for their parents, spouses for each other, and also among siblings as well.

A son/brother in one family described how he was constantly worried about his parents’ safety in Iraq as opposed to here where it was safer. “When my parents’ leave home, I don’t worry about them. It’s not like in Iraq when they left home. I would call them every minute and ask them ‘Where are you? Are you ok?’”

A father/husband in another family also described how he and his family lived in constant fear for each other's safety when they were in Iraq.

I had my mobile all the time on my ear calling my sons 'Where are you son? Did you reach did you arrive at your school? Are you there? Are you home?' ...When they go to school and they go to work every minute I'm worried. Even my wife, when she goes to work and we were continuously in this situation. Although all my children went to school and worked in the same area of our house...anytime we hear a word of a bombing or something we would worry and start calling everyone...Even when you are in your home, any minute we would fear that anyone could just come in and kidnap one of us maybe for money or for anything. And this is what we faced.

His son also described how his family lived in constant fear for each other's safety in Iraq.

You don't know when you will be killed...When I go to work and I come back, my father goes to work, all the family, any minute and we are on the mobile. If we hear a bombing, one will call the other and then we think 'Are you OK? What's happening near you?' ...This is not life and any minute anyone can hear the news: your dad just got killed, your brother got killed, your mother is dead, you're in a bombing, or your friend even.

The second son in this family described further how they lived in constant fear for each other's safety. "I was any minute ready to get a call telling me 'Your dad is killed' or 'Something happened to your mom' or 'Your brother is killed.' So that was our life."

A mother/wife in another family described the powerlessness and fear that she and her family had experienced when her young daughter was involved in a bombing and she could not immediately access her and learn of her fate.

Once I sent my younger daughter to the store to get something and when she was there, there was a bombing and she was stuck in the store. We couldn't go and get her and she couldn't come. The streets were closed. So then a lady from the neighborhood saw her there and she brought her for us....We were all so scared. It's very hard. We couldn't go out and see what's happening. We worried about her. We were sad...it was a very hard situation. We didn't know what to do.

A daughter/sister in another family also described the worry about other family members' safety when they were in Iraq. "You worry about your family. You worry about yourself. If anyone leaves home you are worried about them. What will happen to them?" Her sister similarly described how stressful it was until everyone knew that every family member was safe. "Every time there was a bombing of course the first thing we used to do is everyone check that everyone is there. Where is my brother? Where is my sister? Where is Dad? Mom? Everyone? So we wouldn't be comfortable until we know everyone is there and everyone is safe." The mother/wife in this family also described what it was like for her when her children's safety was threatened.

Because of the bombings, I used to worry about that...I wouldn't trust until I see them or I call them and I found out thank god there's nothing...The place where we lived was everyday explosions and bombings because we lived in the center of the city...The girls will be at school so when I hear a bombing I will run to the school of the girls and bring them and sometimes the schools will fall on the kids. So when I go and get them and they are safe thank god. Many girls died. Many girls were injured. So by the time you see your kids are safe that will kill you.

A father/husband in another family described what it was like for him in Iraq to worry about the safety of his wife and young daughters until they returned home from work and school respectively.

When things started getting worse, it was very hard. I was thinking all the time worried. I worried because my wife worked, and from the minute she leaves home until she comes back I won't be comfortable until she gets home and then I'm comfortable. And the girls,...although the bus came took them from home and brought them back, I would worry until they get back.

“We feel the safety and the peace”

Most families described their vision of and desire for the United States to be a safe and peaceful place to build a life for themselves and their families. Upon arriving to the United States, after initial hesitation and concern by some families about fear of the unknown and a lack of familiarity with American culture, most of the families experienced a drastic sense of relief from such anxieties. They developed a sense of security with their safety such that they felt much more comfortable leaving their homes and venturing out to explore and begin building their new life here. Some families also described their sense of feeling valued as human beings and appreciation of the freedom and protection offered by the United States government.

A father/husband described his expectations for his family in the United States by saying that “life would be better than it was where we were.” He also said that “I was looking for a peaceful place to be resettled in a comfortable place for comfort and a new life for my children and my family.” A father/husband in another family described what he hoped for his family by coming to live here. “I thought about a safe place, a peaceful place and also a place that has a

future for my family and for my kids...I thought I need to put my family in a place where it is safe and they will have a better future.” A father/husband in another family said that they came to the United States because “there's a better life here and it's more safe.” His older son also stated that “We left our country to be protected here...a place for my family to go and continue our lives and be safe and start working and be comfortable.”

Similarly, the daughter/sister in another family described her family’s expectation for the life here.

We used to think that once we get there then we will have freedom and we'll have safety and peace and we can work and study and do whatever we want without fear, without stress because there everything was with stress and fear. So we used to think that once we are here we'll be more comfortable. We'll have a peaceful life.

Her younger sister described how much safer she felt it was here for her family.

Here it is safe and we can go to school and continue our education so in every way I think it's a safer country...Police are here everywhere and as soon as you are in trouble, you have a fire or there's a fight between people, just call the police and they're here...Here it's different. It's a peaceful place. Someone can leave home without you worrying about him. And it's more comfortable not to be worried about everything here. It's better.

A father/husband in another family discussed an expression he had heard or read relating to feeling safe and protected in the United States. It was to the effect that “The United States would move a fleet a ships to protect its citizens.” He also clarified what it meant to him to be valued as a person. “[The United States will] protect me and I will be a human...I will be a

normal human being ...A normal person is the one who has his rights everywhere. His rights will not be lost anywhere.”

The father/husband in another family described what it was like for his family to live in the safer environment here as opposed to the dangerous one from which they came in Iraq.

It's nice to be in a new culture, especially here that the human gets its rights. No one's rights are lost and the human is appreciated as a person and at least we feel the safety and the peace that we missed in our country. And here I don't feel that anyone wants to hurt me...It is safe and peaceful...it's very peaceful. There is no problem at all.

His wife also described the sense of security she felt since living here.

There's freedom. The freedom, here we can go out. We can go places... coming here is different because before we only used to see in the movies about the States. It's a new life, but life there is very difficult and impossible so coming here is much better. Being here is a better life.

She was also so convinced about their young daughters' safety since living here that she even reassured them of such.

When I first took them to school, I was trying to comfort them and tell them 'See this, there's a policeman and there are cameras and everyone will take care of you' because they have come from a place where everything was scary: killers, robbers, and everything was scary. So they need some time to be comfortable and know they are in a peaceful place.

**“WE LEFT EVERYTHING”
(Loss Associated with Trauma)**

“It's hard to say goodbye”/“It's not like the life we used to live”

All families revealed how difficult it was for them to leave their family and friends behind in Iraq, particularly given the traumatic circumstances there. Of all of the experiences that participants described, their experiences saying good bye appeared to evoke the most painfully emotional responses such that several participants became tearful and broke down crying. Not only did families describe the loss of people in their lives due to separation or death, but they also shared experiences of the losses of their culture, language, and homeland which sometimes led to feelings of isolation and perhaps even powerlessness. Families found these losses to be particularly painful because they experienced traumatic events that forced them to incur the losses essentially against their own choosing. Of the family members' who were opposed to leaving their homeland of Iraq to come to resettle in the United States, the most salient reason was because they did not want to leave other family, friends, and their familiar way of life behind.

The husband/father in one family described his family's ambivalence about their decision to apply and upon learning that they had been accepted to come to the United States due to their pain over leaving their family in Iraq.

When I applied for immigration and it came the time and we got the visa and everything, my wife, at the time she didn't want to do this because her family were there and that's our country. It's not easy, but so the time when we got the visa, there were 5 months. I don't know how to describe those months. It was long. It was short. It was hard. We didn't know. We were confused. Even for myself, it was very hard because I have a big family

in XXXXX (city) and I have four brothers with their families and I have seven sisters with their families. And we have a very close relationship and the minute we were saying farewell, goodbye it was very hard for us all. And the hardest thing was and I kept it to the last minute, to the end to say goodbye to my mother.

After describing how hard it was for him to say goodbye to his mother, he broke down crying. He also went on to acknowledge the feelings of loss surrounding his sense of his loss of culture and way of life. "We know that the first year coming to a new country is going to be difficult. It's the most difficult year, changing the language, changing the culture, changing the way of life." His wife expressed great reluctance about leaving her family and life in Iraq to come to live in the United States.

I didn't want to come. I didn't want to come to America because living in a foreign country is very hard. I have tried it before. I had lived in some other countries before and I felt that being far from my family is very hard. So when we used to go to do our papers for coming here, we always used to delay 1 month, 2 months hoping that things would be better and we'd not need to come here. When we were accepted, and at that time things were getting worse in Iraq, I was thinking I am going to lose my family. It was hard for me when I lived in Syria and now this time it's going to be much further, very far...Leaving my family was very very hard. It was the number one hard thing. Losing them and leaving them all behind was hard...the most important thing was being far from my family.

She also described how frightening the loss of culture and their familiar context was to their young daughters. "My daughters are scared because...they don't know the language, not that they don't like it. And they are kind of scared that they don't know what to do."

A father/husband in another family described how hard it was to leave his family back in Iraq.

Leaving our families and coming here [was hard]...When it came the time of saying goodbye and when you see your dad, your brother, your mother crying for saying good bye to you, that's very hard. They were crying because they knew it was going to be a long time. You are going to a place that you're going to be there a long time.

His wife described the loss of support she had received from her family left behind in Iraq.

Back there we were living with our families and here I came, I was all alone with a kid...We were living with our families. They were a great help to us. They supported us financially, emotionally, in every way. They were always there for us and they were like a backbone to us. So when we came here it was just as if we lost that...Just being with them we felt comfortable...because they're our family, our mothers and our fathers and just them being there we were comfortable because they were a blessing to us. They are a blessing.

She also tearfully talked about the loss of their way of life that her and her family left in Iraq by coming to a new place that we don't know anyone in it and leaving our families and also bringing our daughter to a new place that we don't know anyone in and we left everything. My husband left his job. We left our furniture, everything we had, our place...We had a certain amount of weight we can bring things so all we could bring was

our clothes and we both had some things that were memories for us, that we'd like to bring, but we couldn't bring them with us.

She cried as she clarified that some of the physical items they had to leave behind were “everything that reminds me of my family.” She went on to describe how much she missed her family in Iraq.

They are nice memories...because I cannot see me family. I can only talk with them and that's not enough when you miss someone very much...Although I used to live with my husband's family, but still every two weeks I used to go and spend time with my family. But here when you think how far it is, like 15 hours by plane, that's hard.

This mother/wife also described what it was like for her to have her baby and mother her children without her family in the United States as opposed to back in Iraq.

I am alone here. Back in Iraq, I had my family. Especially when I had my baby here, I was all alone. But when I had my first baby, all my family were with me...There when I went to the hospital to have the baby, my mother and my mother-in-law and my husband, they were all with me...But here, although I had already learned to take care of the baby, still I felt I wished I was with my mom...I had told my husband ‘I didn't want anyone to come with me, just you.’ So and I had to leave my daughter with the neighbors because we have no one...The support was less and the feeling that you are all alone.

She tearfully described the aloneness by saying she felt “lonely being without my family.

Without family it's very hard. Although my husband tries to let me not feel that, but I still need my family.” At this point the wife broke down crying and ended the interview by saying “I can't

talk any more” due to her overwhelming emotionally painful reaction to discussing the loss of her family.

The older daughter/sister in another family described having to leave her life back in Iraq by saying “I had to leave my job and also leave all the people that we lived with, worked with. I've been living there all my life and all the people I had to leave...Now I miss them.” She continued to describe how difficult it was to leave her life and the things she had achieved.

I had just graduated and started my job and I was so happy being in a new place, meeting new people at work and getting to know the new life of being employed and having a job so it was hard for me to leave all that because when I graduated I had a plan for my life. She tearfully disclosed that leaving her family's life and home in Iraq was the hardest challenge about coming to the United States. “Leaving our life and house was the hardest thing and to start here from all the beginning. It's hard but we are trying.” When asked to expand upon this experience she broke down crying and responded “I am not well. I can't go back to all this. I'm trying to improve myself, not get unwell.”

Her mother similarly expressed the importance of her family and friends left and that she had never been outside of her homeland and away from everyone she knew in Iraq. This was first and foremost on her mind.

I always think of my family, my friends, my relatives, my country. Here everything changed in my life...The most important thing for me was my family and friends. My sisters, my brothers, my family, they all stayed back there and I love them very much and they love me...It's the first time in my life that I left them. I have never left them in my life.

She also expressed great opposition to her family's decision to leave Iraq to come and live here and was the only one in her family who felt this way. "I didn't want to, but all my family, they wanted to." She went on to say that "Life is different. It's hard for me here. It's not like the life I used to live."

The mother in another family described what it was like to leave her long established life and friends in Jordan when she and her family came to the United States.

It was like a shock because I have lived for 18, 20 years in Jordan and I had things established there so I had a lot to do like sell things, give the apartment, and do many things like to finish whatever I have in Jordan and then also the hard thing was to say goodbye to many friends who were in Jordan, our friends. We cried...It's like you get attached to people that you have lived with. Always saying goodbye is not easy. I have lived years with them, and so it was hard to say goodbye...Where ever you live you have friends that are like family to you. It's hard to say goodbye.

A father/husband from one family described his family's loss of culture and way of life, as well as feelings of isolation upon coming to live the United States, particularly due to the geographic region where his family resettled.

It was a shock at the beginning because...for us coming from a different culture, different education...everything is new for us, the culture, the way we live, the way we think, the way we communicate. Maybe that's what made it difficult for us. I come from a very ancient family that has roots in Iraq for ages, very long, coming here I feel lonely. I feel as if I am cut from my roots and here I feel always lonely...We live in a place where there are no Iraqi gatherings, not only Iraqi but Chaldean Christian Iraqis. There are many

of them living all together in Michigan, in San Diego, California and they have their relationship together, but here the Iraqis are very few and living far from each other. His older son also discussed his feelings about his loss of friends and isolation when he arrived in the United States.

It's different from our country and I felt bored, especially for the first 6 months. I was so bored just staying at home because I had no friends. I had no one...In Iraq I had so many friends. All my friends were in the area that I lived. They know me. When I came here, I felt I am unknown. I have no importance or value...For me, after my family, the most important thing is my friends. They're so important to me.

The grandmother/mother in this family also described feelings of isolation and disconnection, as well as powerlessness when they arrived in the United States.

We arrived to this apartment and then we felt that we don't know anyone. We don't know the language. We don't know how to do anything except for my son that he knows English and that helped us. I don't know anything. I just sit at home...I don't go anywhere...We have no relatives here. We are all alone...I feel bored. I feel stressed and bored. There is no one to talk with me like family. We only sit in the house...What can I do?

Finally, the mother/wife in another family described the loneliness, boredom and isolation her family has experienced due to lack of family in the United States.

We have no family here, no one. We kind of feel lonely...Loneliness is sadness because you are isolated from the outside world...In Iraq we used to visit our family and go see my mother or his mother or my sisters, friends, relatives. We were always with people.

Here we don't have any family so it's just between us. We also don't make friends with a lot of people so we are most of the time all by ourselves.

“We’re leaving them in that place”

Some families described their continuing concern for the safety of family left behind in Iraq and their desire to continue to keep in regular contact with them and monitor their situations. Some had planned to be able to bring their family over here to live with them or wished that they would be able to join them to live in the United States. Some family members also described how the stress they felt about family left behind in dangerous and traumatic situations interfered with their ability to concentrate and focus on building their new life in the United States.

With regard to her daughter still living in Iraq, a grandmother/mother in one family said “I feel sorry for my daughter and I think about her a lot in these hard situations.” A father/husband in another family described how stressful it was for him to be in the United States while he was worrying about his other family left behind in Iraq.

We are so busy thinking about our families back in Iraq who are facing very hard situations. Sometime ago, I talked with my older sister who has a heart problem. She had to walk, 12 months back in Ramadan, she had to walk from 3 or 5 AM until the second day noon. Just walking to get away from their area where they live because they were shooting and airplanes shooting and they were attacking that area. So this will make us stressed.

His wife similarly described her worry about her family members left behind in Iraq and her hope for them to be able to come to live in the United States with her as well.

Life is stressful back there...I have only one brother left in Baghdad and they keep calling him telling him 'Leave Baghdad. Come up here.' Everything is stressful. I wish that they can come here, all of them. Now they are living in XXXXX trying to do something to come here, but I think it's not going to work. It's very hard...I was thinking that after sometime I can do papers for my mom to immigrate and my brother also slowly they can come...They are still trying to leave, but it is difficult. At the beginning I was saying 'Yeah. I will go and you will all follow me.' But now it's all changed.

A daughter/sister in another family described how her family would keep in regular contact with other family still living in Iraq and the stress created for the rest of her family in the United States when her mom urged them to keep up with the negative news about traumas back in their homeland.

My mom sometimes calls our relatives, our friends back there and we talk with them on the phone either just voice or picture...My mom usually comes and tells about the situation in Iraq that she hears and we tell her 'Oh please. Just don't tell us. We just need to rest from this because we had a hard time and we want to rest from all this news.' But then she gets upset and she starts crying and she says 'No. We should know everything about what's happening in our country.' But we don't want to because we need to rest from all those things because we already faced a lot. We lived in a dangerous area so we don't want to hear about it.

Her sister similarly described how difficult it was for her to be in contact with their family left behind in Iraq knowing that they were not in a safe situation.

We talk on the phone with my grandfather, my uncles, my cousins. They are all living there, so they say 'We're good' but I know things are happening. I don't really know what exactly, but we know it's not good...Thinking that we're leaving them in that place, I also feel sorry for them.

A father/husband in another family described his worry for his family still in Iraq.

I feel very worried about them, because they are there and especially when I hear the news and things are happening, I worry very much and when I call them I make sure that everyone is there. So if someone is not there, then I will start thinking something has happened and they are hiding and not telling me the truth. So I call at times when everyone is there so I will be comforted...The worry is because I'm worried that I will lose one of them. I worry that I will lose someone and I haven't seen them. I am talking about the direct family, the mother and father, brother, sister.

“I cannot get the jobs I used to get”/ “I have to start all over again”

Some families who had family members who had earned college degrees and held professional and prestigious positions back in Iraq described their experiences with losing their social status and their ability to obtain equivalent positions in the United States. They expressed frustration due to limited employment opportunities, especially for those who had prior training and work experience in Iraq that were disregarded here. The jobs that they were offered were often low paying and did not provide a high enough income for them to adequately cover their monthly expenses. Moreover, several families had members who had physical ailments that prohibited them from working the unskilled and physically demanding jobs that were usually available and offered to them once they arrived in the United States.

The son/brother in one family described the highly responsible job he had in Iraq that he was forced to leave when his family came to the United States.

I used to work in a very good company. I am a communication engineer so I used to work in a company for mobiles and I had a good job. It was a very good job and I was very comfortable in it, but what can I do? The situation was not good.

His father elaborated on the loss of social status that his son had experienced by leaving his professional position in Iraq when his family came to live in the United States.

Mika'il has studied engineering in a special subject and he worked back in Iraq and he worked in a company who was responsible for internet and mobile that worked with three different cities and he was the one in charge. He worked in XXXXX (city) from the office and he had a good job. And he used to control three groups in three Iraqi cities. And he was successful and loved his job, but now I think he's going to work as a laborer in a bakery...This will affect his feelings.

This father/husband was extremely adamant about the lack of employment opportunities in this country that take advantage of the assets that highly educated and experienced young adult refugees, like his son, have to offer.

I'm not saying that he can work as an engineer here, but at least they should make arrangements. Young men who have special studies who...they can have something for them. They don't have to work as engineers, but also not as laborers, something proper for them for example. And even the country here can benefit from his studies, things he can offer, the things he has studied, his wisdom, and instead of working in wood and forgetting all that.

A daughter/sister in another family, who had earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and who had been working for the government in a prestigious position in Iraq, described the difficulties she faced and the pressure she felt in working at a janitorial job that was too physically demanding for her in order to support her family financially once they were in the United States.

When I started working, it wasn't really the job that I wanted. It wasn't comfortable, so it was hard for me to do that, but I had to because we had to live...I became sick and I quit my job and then the doctors checked me and said that right now I have a permit that I cannot work.

She elaborated on the difficulty and lack of opportunity that she had with her employment in the United States.

At the beginning I was happy with my job, but then I found out that this is where I'm going to stay because where I worked, there was no promotions. Whatever I do, I will still stay because I worked in housekeeping. So whatever I do, whatever happens in progress in my job, I will still be a cleaner...The other thing is that it was hard work for my body. Physically it was very hard work pushing the cart and doing all the cleaning things. So it was very hard.

She went on to express her concern about not being able to find a job that she could physically manage or one that utilized the bachelor's degree that she had earned in Iraq.

I sometimes think that maybe I will never be able to find a job because all jobs here are very hard, very hard for me and I cannot work with my certificate that I have so I might not be able to have any job.

Her mother stated that her daughters were working at jobs in the United States that were too physically demanding and inappropriate for them because of their high levels of education so they had to quit, particularly one of her daughters who became physically ill. "The girls, they started working, but they couldn't continue. She became sick because it's not her job."

Additionally, she felt that she and her husband had made huge sacrifices for her children so they would have easier lives and better opportunities than were currently available to them in the United States.

I haven't let them be tired. I bring everything and offer it for them. I was always there for them...Me and my husband, we did all we could. We had hard times raising them and doing our best for them so they will have a good future, but when we came here, it all went, as if we have done nothing because they had to start with washing dishes.

A father/husband from another family disclosed that the type of jobs available to him here were not the type for which he has been educated and trained in Iraq. "The jobs that I can work now is not what I have studied. I cannot get the jobs I used to get." He went on to describe his profound disappointment about not having the opportunity to pursue additional education and obtain a position related to his previous career here in the United States.

I thought that when I come here, things were going to be different for me. For myself, I thought that I could join some studies or academies or something that would help me work in my specialty. I have studied communications and I was hoping that I would improve in this and have the chance to get jobs in this area here, but now I know that this is a very far dream. This will not happen because this takes a long time, needs a long time. At my age I don't have that very long time to start.

He went on to describe the loss of social status he experienced upon coming to the United States since he was a prominent working professional and had attained numerous prestigious accomplishments in his field before leaving Iraq.

My job in Iraq was photography in journals...and I worked as an artistic director for short films...I was always the director of all these things. So after that when I come here I have to do something very different from this. And besides working at something very different from what I did, I also have to have to be strong enough to do hard work...I also wish that I could get a good job because I can't work any job...because I also have some medical issues that I didn't mention and that will prevent me from working hard jobs.

His wife, who was an educated working professional in Iraq, similarly reported the loss of social status when they left Iraq to come to the United States.

I had a good job. I was a teacher. I had graduated from a university, from college. And here I can't work like that. I have to start all over again and I will not get any job like that. I'll have to just start any job.

In spite of her medical condition that interfered with her ability to work, especially at physically demanding work, she emphasized her desire to work outside the home. "It's not that I don't want to work...I worked back in Iraq and I want to work. I like to work. I don't like to stay at home, that's not the thing." However, she continued by describing how difficult it was for her and her husband to accept and be able to work jobs involving physically demanding labor.

As soon as I came, everyone was telling me 'All the jobs that they have is cleaning toilets and cleaning sinks and this kind of jobs.' So I immediately had this feeling why am I going to work after I was a teacher and my students were adults and now I have to do this

kind of job. And this hurt me...I am not used to thinking I was a teacher and I'm going to work cleaning...I don't know if I'll get used to it...Also my husband, XXXXXX (case worker) called him and said that there is a job for you on XXXXX XXXXX (street) in a hotel. But it was very hard for him to go because he had always had a disk in his back. He complains he cannot do everything.

A father/husband in another family described how he struggled to spend time with his family and keep up with familial rituals because of the work schedules that he, his wife, and sons were forced to maintain to “make ends meet” and pay their bills.

For me, I have some responsibilities toward my family. I want to go to church with them. I want to see them. I want to go out somewhere, but I can't do this because where I work they just want me to be there. Where I work, there working on the weekends is not an option...Right now I don't see or spend time with my family because my children work at night and I come at night they're not there. Today, it's a weekend and my wife had to work in the morning and when I leave, she'll come and it's always like this. We are always running to work. In Iraq it's not like this. You can't work more than until five or six and then everyone goes home and gathers and there isn't even any jobs in the night except for the police or government kind of things.

During his interview, he was watching the time because he had to go to work within the hour even though it was a Saturday and he said “You go to work and come home and go to work and come home. No rest...So today is a weekend, but I have to go to work...Sometimes I work all week. I have no weekend.” His older son described his father's existence as “My dad, you saw, he's all the time at work.” This father/husband also compared work conditions in Iraq with those

in the United States such that he felt taken advantage by his employer here. “This is one of the things that I don't like about the States. You feel they don't care about the human. You just have to work all the time.” He also discussed the need for his sons to work to support their family as well, but that they all were in a “catch 22” situation with regard to earning low wages because they did not bring their high school diplomas from Iraq and even if they had, they would not be recognized here.

They chose to work because they need to work. Life here is very costly. There are many things like the car insurance, the rent, and groceries are very expensive. The other thing is that for us as refugees the wages are very low so they work with the lowest income...because to get higher income they would need certificates and even if they had brought their papers from Iraq, they would not accept it here.

Finally, a father/husband in another family who had earned a bachelor's degree in hospitality and hotel management in Iraq described how he accepted working a job in a bakery, even though he was overqualified, until he found a better job because he knew he had to work to support his family.

When I first came here I was offered a job and that was the only job that was offered to me so I had to take it. It wasn't the best job, but I still accepted it because I needed a job...My first job was at a bakery and I worked there for 3 weeks and I did what I had to do.

“My purse is empty”/ “How are we going to pay?”

While most families experienced an increased sense of physical safety and security after leaving Iraq and coming to live in the United States, some families reported that their stress

originating from the dangers they faced in their homeland was replaced by another type of stress. These families experienced pronounced stress and pressure to meet their financial obligations. Even though they had been living under perilous conditions back in Iraq, some were better equipped to financially meet their family's needs back in Iraq through working in their chosen professions that generated adequate income for their family. In addition, some families had extended family members near them in Iraq to provide financial assistance when necessary. Families, who had been living in this country for varying lengths of time, reported involuntarily assuming economic burdens larger than they felt they could comfortably manage due to the higher cost of living here compared to what they had been accustomed to in Iraq. These families' struggles with meeting their needs financially were partly a result of the loss of equivalent employment opportunities, social status, and familial support they experienced by leaving Iraq and coming to resettle in the United States.

The father/husband in one family described how his family's fear of physical danger in Iraq was subsequently replaced by feeling stress and fear about the future and how they would financially support and sustain themselves here in the United States. "When I came here now the fear has changed into fear about other things, about the future about life here." He related how he felt about the financial demands and lack of options imposed upon him.

We don't have work and we face things we have to pay: rent, XXX (electric bill), and many bills...I have come to the States as a refugee and they put me in an apartment that's rent is \$750 and immediately I make a lease for one year and if I refuse to live in it then I have to take my suitcases and my family and put them in the street and go look for

somewhere to live in and I have just arrived. I don't know where this street goes, where that street goes.

His oldest son also expressed the pressure he felt to work to support himself and his family even after they had just recently found safety from the physical harm back in Iraq.

The most important thing is that someone finds a job here so he can pay his rent and the bills and buy food...I need to work to pay the rent, to pay the XXXX (electric company), and the bills. So this is why I need a job...We have to help each other as a family because we know that in the States more than one person has to work in the family because the style of life is not easy, it's difficult. There are a lot of things we have to pay and just to survive, just to pay the important things, two or three people need to work in the family. This is not for luxury or for entertainment, but for the important things in life. So although we have come from killing and kidnapping and hard things, still we have to face reality and start working.

Moreover, he expressed concern about being able to find a job that paid a high enough salary for him to be able to support himself and his family.

Here the jobs are not what I thought they are because at XXXX (refugee resettlement agency) when I went looking for a job, first of all they have only part time jobs. They don't have full time jobs. And the second thing is they only pay \$7.50 or so an hour and that very little. So I told them I need a job that is a full time job and that's at least \$9 or \$10 an hour so it will be enough for me to pay the rent and the important things.

A daughter/sister in another family described the pressure the family was under to pay their bills on their limited income and if they were not able to do so, how they would go without certain items.

One of the things that happened is when my sister and brother quit their jobs, the income was much lower than before so now we have to be more careful in many ways. One of the things is the usage of electricity. We started even the TV, sometimes we don't watch. We just watch on our phone what we want and about the food, because they had already put our food stamps lower because they were working, so now we are not buying the things that are not very necessary like the treats and the chips and these things.

Her mother expressed her concern about her family's ability to pay the rent for their apartment in the United States.

Here we have to pay rent and we all don't have jobs so until where are we going to go?

They need rent. How are we going to pay?...If I don't pay my rent, they will throw my stuff outside. Where do I go?...At the office they want the rent. After a few days we will pay the rent and after that what are we going to do the other months?

She described how the limited monetary reserve that her family had was being depleted to pay for necessities.

There is no work. There is no money. All what we had is going to finish soon...We had some money we thought we'd buy a car with it, but now we're not going to be able to buy the car because we are paying the rent and electricity from it.

She also expressed desperation about her inability to financially support her family or provide for her family.

We can't live here because we have no money so what can we do? I am not able to work. I have never worked and my health-I can't work so and I have no money. How can I buy anything if I need, want something and I want to buy or I want to buy something for my daughters, my purse is empty.

Finally, she admitted that although the family felt physically safer here, they were stressed by having to meet financial demands that they did not have in Iraq. "Here although there is no bombings, there is other different things like you have to pay rent. There we didn't pay rent."

The father/husband in another family expressed his concern about access to health care and the high costs associated with it in this country.

If you get sick it's very complicated to see a doctor. You need to have health insurance and if you don't work you can't get health insurance and if you face any danger and you need to go to the hospital, everything is complicated. I have a friend. He stayed 2 days at the emergency and that cost him \$20,000. Where can we bring that kind of money from? Even if they do payments, I can still work and still have more payments and other things, other bills and I can work all my life and not be able to pay.

The father/husband in another family expressed his anxiety about his ability to financially support his family since they have arrived in this country.

I'm worried because I feel myself at my age I 'm not young and I'm not old and I still haven't gotten a job. So when I get a job will I be able to support them for a long time to be able to fulfill their needs? And I had in my mind things that I wanted to provide for my daughters, a certain way to make them live. So will this happen? Will I be able to do that? All these things I think about.

He described the pressure he felt to obtain and hold a job since his wife was physically disabled and his daughters were too young to work and help support their family.

I also worry about me getting a job. What kind of a job can I get? I think my wife is not able to work and even I, I can't do very hard kind of work. So even when I get a job, how long am I going to be able to stay in a good job and...if I had older children who can work, that would be different, but my daughters are young.

As a result of the uncertainty about his getting a job, he described the family's inability to feel comfortable settling in their apartment because of the fact they might not be able to continue to afford the rent.

It will cost us now and I still don't have a job. I don't know what job I'm going to get...The other day my wife was telling me 'When are we going to be settled down and know this is our place?' Even here, although I'm living here, I'm comfortable, but this not my house. Any minute I don't have the rent I have to leave. So we think when are we going to be settled and have our own place that this is our home?...Even the apartment, although it's very nice, but still we don't know if we are going to stay here or not. We can't buy things and furnish the apartment and make it a home because we don't know if we are staying here or not.

“NOW WE HAVE HOPE”/“WHAT FUTURE DO WE HAVE?”
(Hope/Lack of Hope)

“It was like a dream for us”

Most of the families shared experiencing excitement and enthusiasm, and hoping for a better future and increased opportunities for themselves and their children by coming to live in the United States. These anticipated prospects ranged from obtaining employment in one's

professional field, receiving a superior education and opportunities to study, and ultimately obtaining American citizenship. Some parents of young children expressed the value of their daughters obtaining an education in schools with a more gender egalitarian culture than had been true in Iraq.

A father/husband from one family viewed leaving his homeland of Iraq to come to live in the United States with unbridled optimism and enthusiasm. He stated “Coming to the United States was a dream to me. I had this dream for a long time.” He went on to say

I had this dream of coming here and when I got married I said ‘Yes. I have to do this.’

My dream is to get the American citizenship because being an American citizen then you have all your rights. You will be valued as a person having your rights. So my hope is to get the American citizenship and then maybe help the rest of my family who are in Iraq to come here.

He represented one of the only families that felt optimistic and satisfied with regard to his employment opportunities since coming to live here. He described his job as a quality control auditor at an automobile parts manufacturing plant.

I found a better job so I started working in it and I am in a good position in that place.

And I like what I’m doing. I think it’s a good job...They paid more and when I started working there, I was chosen to be in a good place in the company...Especially lately, they chose me from all the older ones to go in a higher position in that place...This place has future. I can always be getting promotions.

A son/brother in another family discussed his hope for a better life for his family by leaving Iraq. “Before when we used to think of America and Europe, any place outside of Iraq,

we used to think of a better life, a good life.” Further, he described his family’s excitement upon hearing that they were accepted to live in the United States. “It was like a dream for us that they called us and they said that ‘You are accepted and you are going to the States’ because we had settled our life to live in that scary situation day-by-day.”

A mother from another family described similar feelings about bringing her family to come to live in America. When considering her experience of coming to live here, she proclaimed “I was very happy because I chose America. When they asked me ‘Where do you want to go to choose as a second country to go and live in?’ I chose America because I like America.” She went on to elaborate about wanting her children to have the opportunity to live in the United States.

It is exciting because we used to hear from the movies that America is the land of dreams, dreamland. And in the books they say America is the dream land. It's the wonderful place so and it's true. Of course I will be happy that my children will have the chance to live in this country and have this wonderful life and I prefer it over living that tiring hard life back there.

Her daughter described her hopes for a better future for herself and her family by pursuing her education here especially because the degrees earned in this country are more valued than those earned back in her homeland.

When we came here I had great hopes that I will have a better future. I will study. I will do my best to make my family proud of me and it will be worth it that we came here...In America for now our life is very normal, but we have big plans for the future...The most important reason...that we came here is my studies...My hope is in studying. Studying

here is much better than in our countries because the certificates are more accepted and higher, but those certificates in Arab countries are not much valued.

A daughter/sister in another family expressed her hope for the future by saying “now we have hope for living here. Life became easier...It has chances for us to go to school, study, and in every way it is a better life” She also related her father’s sentiment about his hope for their family’s future by stating what he had said to them. ““We have this new chance to go to this better place and have a better life, a better future.””

Another father/husband discussed his hope a better future for his family and specifically his two young daughters’ education by coming to live here.

I wish that my life here will improve, will be better for me and for my family and I wish that my daughters will have their chance to study and have education...This is something that they would not have had back in our country, but here they will have this and that will make me happy to see them grow up and having better chances in life...hopefully in the future things will be better for us.

His wife similarly reported hope for their daughters’ future. “The most important thing was our daughters, for their future, because here they can go to school.”

Finally, another father/husband described the reasons he wanted to come to the United States with regard to his young daughters’ education and future.

I thought so let's come here and start a new life for our children...Now they are enrolled in schools and I know their life is going to be in order, going to school, step by step, growing...Here the male and female they have equal rights. They are the same, so I know my daughters have their rights in schools and education.

“When we came here I feel all I did is nothing”/“I had something different on my mind”

While initial hopes were high for most families prior to arriving in the United States, after living here for varying lengths of time, some families’ expectations were often not met with regard to educational opportunities, particularly for their young adult children. Some parents and children described their extreme disappointment and lack of hope about their future due to lack of recognition or acceptance of past educational achievements in Iraq. Some families also described the barriers they had encountered in pursuing their post-secondary school education in the United States. These disappointments, perceived barriers, and lack of opportunities not only affected individuals, but also the morale of the entire family.

A father/husband in one family expressed serious concern about his older sons’ current employment predicaments since coming to the United States and their potential for future opportunities.

One of them has graduated as an engineer from a very good university in Iraq and the other one was a student in college studying business and when we came here it's hard for them to evaluate their bachelor’s degree and also to have time between working and taking care of their future because they cannot stay laborers all their lives. They have studies. They can't stay laborers working as laborers all their lives...I still don't know how their life will go on.

His son also described the violence he endured at the university to earn his degree in Iraq and now he was not going to be able to get a job that utilized his education and experience.

I am doing a big sacrifice...It was dangerous to go and come all those years and besides I was threatened from the former university that I went to. I was threatened there and I was

wanted and still I went and I finished my studies...I am leaving the things that I studied in the hard times in Iraq, in the times where one day when I was in college there were 11 bombings in one day and through all of those hard times I gave 4 and 5 years of my life just studying to get this degree and now I'm just leaving it because at XXXXX (refugee resettlement services) they told me 'You can't work in your specialty. You have to work any job for now until you evaluate your certificate. It will take you 2 or 3 years and then you can start to.' So I'm leaving all that I studied and I give years of my life in hard situations. Who would go and study in these hard situations that risked my life every day? He went on to describe the lack of value given here to the college degree for which he risked his life in Iraq. "Now it is just like I have it with me, but it is just a paper with some words on it. It's not appreciated."

A father/husband in another family described the difficulties his young adult sons encountered in pursuing post-secondary school education in this country. "My children had a choice to study or work, but to study that would cost very much and they couldn't afford that so they chose to work. And because of the language also it was a barrier also for studying." The father also expressed disappointment over his sons and other young adult refugees' difficulty in pursuing their education once in the United States.

We had hope that they would come here and continue their studies...But it was too complicated so they couldn't. And this is the same with all of the young men or young ladies who come. My children's friends at this age, it's happened with them all. They just couldn't continue their studies. As I told you, because it's very costly and with this study

you have to go and come and buy gas and pay the car insurance and if they need to do all of this, they need to work. So how are they going to study and work? It was hard.

A daughter/sister in another family arrived in the United States expecting to be able to enroll in college right away, but found that there were financial barriers that stood in her way and needed to obtain full-time employment first in order to receive financial assistance.

I tried to go to college once I came, but they didn't accept me because I'm not from XXXXX (southeast U.S. city). I'm from outside and this is why I have to work. So I hope that I will get a job as soon as possible and I'm trying to get a job so I can join college next semester. They will accept me and because I have left school for a year and a half already, I don't want it to be a longer time then I will not be successful. I want to start now. And the rule of the college was that I work a full-time job for some time so I will be considered from this state. I will be accepted in the college, but I'm not finding a job. It's hard to find a job, especially in XXXXX (southeast U.S. city). I'm going to job club, but it still that XXXXXX (resettlement agency) is not very serious or not -still hasn't found me a job so I'm still trying.

A mother/wife in another family expressed distress about her young adult children's difficulties in continuing their education here by saying "Studying is very hard." She also expressed distress about all of the investment that she and her husband had made into their children's education and future and that she felt it was wasted since it was not valued in the United States.

All my life, I took good care of them so they will be educated and be in levels and have good jobs and have a good future, but when we came here I feel all I did is nothing because they didn't benefit from what they studied.

She described the challenges that her children had in pursuing their education and specifically how her son's prior college education has been wasted since he came to the United States.

About their studies, not the young ones, the older ones, what do they do? Do they go back to studying, continue their studies or find jobs...All what me and my husband we did, we run for them, what we did for them is gone...their studies and future...We're not sorry for paying all that and doing all that, but we're sorry because here it's not accepted. It's not appreciated...My son was in his 3rd grade in college...My son needs to continue his college but there's nothing...Why does he have to leave it all and just sit home? Why can't he have the chance? They want to continue their life, their studies, let them. Give them chances.

Because she felt that her older children did not have opportunities to utilize or pursue their education here she said "Here in America only the little kids who come very young, they are the ones who benefit." One of her daughters described the strong value that her mother had placed on education for her children prior to coming to the United States and what an education meant to their mother.

She [Mom] always encouraged us to study and take care of our studies and to have a better life because she didn't have any studies and she used to tell us 'I want you to have a better life than I have. Look at me now. I can't work because...I haven't studied anything. And I cannot communicate a lot with people or read something for myself. But I want

you to have a better life. So that will happen if you study more and take care of your future. You will have a better future.'

This daughter also described how she was not able to graduate high school in Iraq due to her family's decision to leave to come to the United States and how she had to proceed on an alternate path to pursue her education here.

In Iraq I was supposed to finish high school after 4 months, but when I came here they refused that I go to high school because I am over 18 so now I am studying the GED and that will be like the high school, but now I'm studying the ESL, the English first and then I will continue the GED. It is kind of slow and it takes a longer time...About my study too, because I thought I had something different on my mind. I thought that I was going to go to school, to high school, but that didn't happen so it slowed down the process of my studies.

Another daughter in this family who had initially been working in housekeeping when she arrived in this country and subsequently quit, expressed her concern over not having the opportunity to advance her education in this country even though she had already earned a bachelor's degree in Iraq. "I thought I will never be able to study here...But now I started some studies in GED and am trying to do it better." She clarified that she believed that she needed to earn her high school diploma even though she had already graduated from college in Iraq because in Iraq she was not issued a high school diploma since she entered directly into college. Consequently, she did not qualify for jobs in the United States that required a high school diploma until she had completed the GED.

When I quit my job they said they will cut the food stamps unless only if I study the GED and then they can find me a job with a high school degree. Because here they will not accept my college degree so and they want me to have a job as soon as possible so I had to do this.

“Once we come to the States she'll be healed”

Several families specifically came to the United States with high hopes of receiving superior medical treatment compared to the care that was available to them in Iraq or at least prompt attention to the ailments either for themselves or their family member. The medical conditions ranged in nature and complexity, however all significantly affected family members, and subsequently the entire family's quality of life. The families hoped that with the improved care that they anticipated receiving here that their family members would make more rapid progress in their recovery and have improved results over those that they might have achieved back in Iraq. One family had already pursued advanced medical care in Jordan for the father/husband's injuries, but had been told that there was no more that could be done for him there and that he should pursue further treatment in the United States.

The father/husband from one family expressed hope for improvement in his wife's post-traumatic stress disorder which she suffered as a result of her family's extensive exposure to violence in Iraq. “We hope...we are seeking help for her here. Hopefully it will work for her.” He also went on to describe how he and his family had high expectations for medical treatment that they hoped their youngest son would receive for his eye condition. They were informed from others before they arrived in the United States that his medical issue would be given priority and addressed immediately by resettlement workers.

My younger son has a disability. He does not see in one of his eyes. He is blind in one eye and the other eye because he has the focus on it, it is going down and down and now it is half the normal strength...Before coming here, I had heard from people that when we arrive and they know that we have such a need, they will very highly take care of this thing and care for it. Before coming I had heard that as soon as we come they are going to take care of him and take him to doctors and maybe do surgery and help him...I also had heard that would help him financially. We will get financial aid because of his situation. The mother/wife in another family described her husband's hope for her to receive improved medical treatment for her debilitating arthritic condition here.

My husband told me 'Let's go for you to be treated from the sickness' and he said that doctors here are better and treatments and it's not like in Iraq. The most that they could do was give me chemical treatment, but here they said 'It's going to be different.' They can help me more...My hope is that here some other doctor will see me and they will give me something else. They will treat me and they will know better because of the advanced medicine here. But my fear is that what if here they also don't know what it is and they cannot help me.

Her husband also stated that one of the reasons he wanted to come here was so "she can be treated" for her condition.

This is one of the reasons we came here...When we first came I told everyone about the situation of my wife and I told them that this is 90% the reason why we came here...If they cared about it, I would say it was worth that I came here.

Another family came to the United States seeking advanced medical care for both the father/husband's debilitating injuries and his daughter's medical condition that was not available to them in Iraq or Jordan. The father/husband stated that "I have come the first reason especially for my treatment." He had undergone three unsuccessful surgeries in Iraq, after which time he went to Jordan and "Did 29 surgeries there and then I reached a level where the doctors said 'This is the most that we can help you. You need to go to other countries that are more advanced' and so I applied to come to the United States." His wife described improved access to "medical care" for her husband and her daughter's conditions in the United States. "In Jordan and in Iraq we couldn't afford because doctors are very expensive and medicine...I needed medicine for my daughter and it was very expensive. I couldn't afford to buy it. Here it's available." She expressed hope for her daughter's recovery and future. "I had it on my mind that once we come to the States she'll be healed. She'll be well and she had the same idea. She thought that once she's here, she will be well."

**"CAN WE HELP YOU? DO YOU NEED ANYTHING?" "THE ASSISTANCE FOR US AS REFUGEES IS VERY LITTLE"
(Support/Lack of Support)**

"We felt welcomed" "From Iraqis you don't get any help"

Families described their experiences interacting with local community members upon their arrival to the United States. The families whose experiences of this type stood out for them all related favorable interactions with "Americans". These families found community members, including neighbors, teachers, apartment management staff, and bus drivers to be extremely helpful, kind, welcoming, and friendly. They also described how important these supportive and positive exchanges were to their adjustment to living in their new homeland. However, while

some families positively described interactions with fellow “Iraqi/Arab” neighbors in the same way as they did “Americans”, other families had the opposite experiences. In these instances, they had found their Iraqi/Arab peers to be unhelpful, unsupportive, unaccommodating, and intrusive.

The father/husband in one family described the connection with and friendliness from others that he and his family developed and its importance to them since they didn’t know anyone else when they first arrived in the United States.

I brought my family to a place that they haven't been mixed with any other people before. They haven't seen any strangers, but after some time after coming here they got used to that and they mixed with people...We are mixing with the people. We are the same as the neighbors. There are some families feeling like they are strangers in the place. Strangers, like maybe they don't like to communicate with some people, but I am communicating and mixing with people, different people.

From his wife’s perspective, she admitted that she was not a very sociable person. “I don't easily mix with people. My nature is that I don't make a lot of friends so it was hard for me to mix with others.” However, she also described an experience similar to her husband’s. “I came here. I didn't have any family or friends so it was very difficult,...but after sometime we started getting to know some other people around us here, Iraqis and others, from other countries too and that made things better.”

The father/husband in another family described his family having a positive and opposite experience to what they expected, such that they expected to be mocked or ridiculed for wearing traditional Muslim dress or being culturally different when they arrived in the United States.

Once we came here I saw that that was not true. No one notices and the way my wife dresses is accepted here...When we came we saw that no one does these things. People respect each other and they don't make fun of each other. Everyone minds their own business.

His wife reported similar experiences to those of her husband. "I saw everything was the opposite of what I was afraid of. About the scarf, nobody bothered me and no one was bothered that I am wearing it."

The father/husband in another family described the support of people he and his family felt from the local community since moving to the United States.

One of the things that's helping me to stay is the people around me. They are very kind, very loving, very caring. Whenever I meet people everyone is telling us 'Can we help you? Do you need anything? Can we do anything?' And this is letting me stay, seeing the kindness of the people around here.

Additionally, he described a situation where his daughters were being teased and bullied by other neighborhood children so he reported the situation to the apartment complex management staff and received a positive response that was very favorable and supportive. "I went and told the land lord in the office and she said 'I don't mind letting all of them leave the apartments because of what they are doing, but I want you to stay.'" His wife also described how nice and supportive she has found Americans, specifically, to be since living in The United States. "The way people treat you is different...The Americans are very nice. The relationship with them is very nice." She went on to describe the caring and support that her daughters receive from their teachers at school.

My daughters' school, they are very very nice. I am so surprised to see them so loving. Everyone is caring for them and they are so happy and my daughter came and told me that the other day she was crying at school and the teacher came and hugged her and gave her candy and was taking care of her and they are being so very nice to them.

Contrarily, she described a lack of support that she and her husband experienced from fellow Iraqis in their community.

When you first come they know, the Iraqis, that you have just come and you need help so we tried to tell them about our needs or anything, but from Iraqis you don't get any help...My husband studied the book of driving to get the driving license and this was 2 months ago and since then everyone around us, the Iraqis, they know that this is what we need. We need just someone to take him to that place where he can do the test, but no one cares. No one helps and we can't go by bus and also we heard that taxis are very expensive. It will be \$100 or \$200...It's just taking him to that place to do the test.

Similarly, the daughter/sister in another family described the other Arabs in her community as unsupportive.

We're trying not to mix a lot with Arab people because we found out that the Arabs are the bad people here, not the Americans...Here people, Arab people, don't help each other, so I have no one to show me what to do,...what to do with the college, to help me understand how things go...We were shocked when we came here and we saw no one helps, especially the Arabs.

She elaborated about her experience with Arab people and how they were not helpful to her family since they have arrived in the United States.

There's a family that is our sponsor. They are related to us so they used to say 'We're going to help you and will do this and that.' But once we came here, we need things, they either disappear 2 weeks and then they show up or their phone's always locked whenever we need them. And then for my university,...there are girls here who live here in the neighborhood who are Iraqi and go to the same university. I tried to ask them just to show me the way to make me understand how things go. They said 'Yes we will help you' and the next day all the phones were locked and they just disappeared. And the Americans, usually they don't like gossip, everyone minds their own business, but the Arabs no, they like gossip so they just interfere in your lives and want to talk. So the best thing is to stay away from them.

Contrary to her daughter's experience with Arabs in the United States, her mother described feeling supported by a fellow Arab friend here.

I was introduced to a lady who is from an Arab background. Her husband is American and I was very attached to her because she is very helpful to us. She takes us with her car. She took us to the university. She takes us places and I feel I like her very much.

She also described fellow Iraqi refugees in the community as "nice people...People [who] are working, children [who] are going to school, just living an ordinary life."

However, both mother and daughter in this family unanimously agreed about how supportive and helpful they found Americans to be to them. The daughter/sister described her positive experience with Americans once she came to live here. "When we came here, we saw that the people were treating us very well whether they were white or black. They are all nice." With regard to her initial fear of black people and them being dangerous she said

when we came here we saw that that's not true so now we are comfortable about that...The first time that we went on a bus and the driver was black and I showed him the address that we-where we needed to go. So when we got there he stopped the bus and he took us by hand and walked us to the place where we needed to be and he stayed with us and he saw that we were nervous so he said 'you don't need to be afraid of anything. You're not hurting anyone. No one will hurt you. Just relax.' And he was very kind with us and he waited until the other bus came and he put us on it and then he went back to his bus. So that made us really relaxed.

Her mother similarly described her positive experiences and encounters with Americans upon arriving to the United States using the word wonderful repeatedly to describe them.

When I came here, I saw the people are very nice, very kind, very caring and this is what I was expecting from them...This is what I had thought and people are very nice...We went to the university and we saw people were very wonderful, very nice people. In my son's school where he goes the teachers and everyone, they are wonderful. They are over wonderful...My son does not speak English so everyone in the school, everyone, they try to help him. If not by making him learn English, then they will talk with him with signs, just to make him to feel comfortable, to understand. That's something wonderful...So I saw all the community made me feel very comfortable emotionally.

A daughter/sister in another family described how welcomed and supported her family felt when they were introduced to members of the local community, both Americans and Arabs.

We felt more welcomed and especially we knew that we were introduced to other Arabs...The next day some Arabs visited us and the day after Americans visited us and

everyone was trying to help us and talk with us to live, showing us how to live a better life and make things easy for us. We felt welcomed.

With the regard to the local community, her sister similarly stated that “once we came, we saw that the people welcomed us and they were teaching us ways to live a better life and talking with us and accepting us.” She also described how her family had successfully integrated into the local community since they had arrived in the United States and were enjoying an active social life.

We meet people. We talk with them. We can communicate, making friends, so we are mixing in the community, having our life...Now we can mix with the people. When we first came we didn't leave the door of the house. We just couldn't meet people, but now...we feel more mixed with the community. We go on picnics. We mix with people. We see people and they invite us to some parties and some occasions.

“They are nice people, church people”

Some of the families described assistance that they received from local church communities in terms of emotional and educational support, as well as through the donation of household necessities. This receipt of support from church communities was unrelated to the religious practices of each family since families of differing Islamic denominations, in addition to the family who practiced Christianity, shared favorable experiences with church communities in the United States. The church community seemed to fill in a void and promoted an increased sense of connection for these families who were feeling isolated and disconnected from family and friends left back in Iraq. Moreover, families who were of the Muslim faith described their

church community as accepting of them and not as intrusive or in any way attempting to convert them or change their religious beliefs.

The father/husband in one family described how helpful their church community was when his family first arrived in the United States.

When we first arrived, we had just one couch, some kitchen stuff, and the bed in this apartment, but after some time we were introduced to some people from a church that helped us a lot and we started knowing them and having conversations with them, going and coming, so they helped us with a lot of furniture too.

A daughter/sister in another family described biweekly attendance at English classes held in a local Methodist church as an activity that the entire family looked forward to for the social interaction, as well as the educational benefit. “When it's the time for English class, all of the family goes. We all get ready. Even my sister who's married with her husband and the kids and my parents, we all go to the class.” She also described social gatherings offered by local churches that she and her family attend, as well as a party thrown by the church group who offered summer classes, including English lessons, to the local refugee children. “My sister, when she graduated from the summer school, they made a party and they invited us. They invite us from churches sometimes for lunch and we go to their party.”

The father/husband in another family described the support and friendship he and his family received from the local church community, particularly at a time when he was missing his mother back in Iraq.

We had just newly arrived and someone knocked on our door from a church and they invited us. They had brought some food to the complex and invited all the families, and

on that day I had talked with my mom and I was not feeling well, so my wife and kids went down and they were having fun and everyone was talking with them. And then after some time I was looking at them from the window. I went down and someone came to me and started, introduced themselves and started talking with me and being very nice and asking me 'Are you alone or with family?' And so this is something very nice. This person introduced me to his family too and we became friends...He introduced me to other people from church and I still have the relationship with them. They call me and they invited us twice to their church and even this Sunday we went and they are very nice to us.

His wife also described the support her family received from the local church. "They are nice people, church people. They even invited us and we went a few times to church."

The father/husband in another family described the support they received from the church they attended. "If it were not for the church and a friend taking us, being with us, we would have felt it [the isolation] harder." His son also emphasized the importance of being a member of a church in the United States by saying "I have a church. In Iraq I didn't have a church. Now I have a church." The grandmother/mother in this family also described her experience with her family's ability to participate with the church and stressed the importance of being able to go to church.

Here Pastor XXXXX, he contacted us and he started coming and picking us up from home and taking us to church every week. We also have another meeting in XXXXX's house...It is a Bible study meeting in a person's house...When we started going to the church we are very comfortable.

“The organization took care of us as if we were a golden medal”

Most families shared strong sentiments about the treatment of and benefits offered to them as refugees since arriving in the United States. Several families related very positive experiences with resettlement policies, services, staff, and volunteers. These families felt satisfied, cared for, supported, and that their basic necessities of life, including physical and emotional ones, had been adequately provided for. From the moment they arrived in the United States, or in one case even upon their departure at the airport upon leaving to come here, they also described a sense of security, trust, and confidence in the organizations and the workers with whom they came in contact.

Although initially apprehensive about how they were going to support themselves financially once in the United States due to the husband’s permanent disability and inability to work, one family expressed relief and satisfaction with the governmental financial benefits and assistance that they received. Initially the father/husband from this family stated that he was “worried about how we are going to manage our living like me and taking care of my family because I cannot work and my wife cannot work because of my situation.” His wife reported similar concerns by stating “I had worries about how we are going to manage and live in a new place ...My husband cannot work because of his situation and I can't work also because I have a sick daughter and I used to say how are we going to stay in a new place...I had no idea. It was mysterious.” However, once in the United States, his concern about not being able to support his family was allayed due to the benefits they receive.

Once we came here we saw that everything was easy. Like the apartment we live in is nearly free and we get help many kinds in every way...and I get assistance for being

disabled so things are not like what I thought...I get my pension. It's three or four times more than what I used to get in Iraq and I also was able to buy a car and make payments for that. We have nothing like that there and the apartment is nearly free. It's a very low rent I pay.

His wife also reported that "when we came here, things are easier because they gave him salary, the SSI, and he has health insurance so it's not as hard as when we were in Iraq."

This family also had a daughter whose schooling and educational progressed was negatively impacted by her medical condition because she was not able to attend school regularly and required home schooling in Iraq and then Jordan. However, once in the United States, her father described how the resettlement agency school liaison, her physician, and her teacher cooperatively set up a plan such that she could attend school in person, at least part-time.

When we came here...with the help of XXXXX (the school liaison) and some others, we had a tutor for her here at home that teaches and still we hope that she could go to normal school, a real school. So this year after the second semester, her tutor, with XXXXXX (the school liaison) and her doctor, helped her to go to school every week.

A daughter/sister in another family described her positive experiences with receiving ample support from resettlement personnel since arriving in the United States.

Once we arrived here, we saw how XXXXX (resettlement agency) came and took us from the airport and they brought us to our apartment and they were nice to us...When we first arrived we were feeling lost and we don't know anyone or anything, but when we arrived...they came to welcome us, the people from XXXXX (resettlement agency), with an interpreter so we were comfortable with that...They brought us to our apartment.

She also described receiving the support of volunteer tutors from the resettlement agency who taught her and her family English. “Many volunteers helped us and came and taught us English and they are the same people who helped me to get into the GED.” She described how it felt for her to receive help from these volunteers.

It's a very happy feeling because they care and they want to help us to study more, to learn things more and they even don't want us to go here and there. They come here and see us more comfortable learning so they came here and teach us.

Her sister similarly described how her family felt very supported by resettlement agency personnel upon their arrival here.

When we first came, XXXXXX (resettlement agency) welcomed us and they brought us here...They welcomed us at the airport and brought us to our apartment and they had already bought the furniture for us, everything and food. They took us to English classes and they helped us in every way and to doctors and [even] now they found us jobs. [Even] now whenever we need something we go to them. They take care of us in every way.

She described in further detail how volunteers from the resettlement agency and local community were supporting and assisting her and her family.

I have communications with people from here, mixing in the community and they are helping me a lot. Giving me advice which way to take, what to study, what to do. They are helping me a lot in taking steps so now I'm taking one step at a time and doing better and they are also teaching us English in a very good way, teaching us a lot of English so

we can be better in everything...They [volunteers from the community] are helping us to do things.

The daughter/sister in another family clearly stated who she could trust. "You can't trust everyone. I can trust XXXXX (resettlement agency)." Moreover, her mother enthusiastically and jubilantly praised the treatment and support her family had received from local refugee resettlement services and agency personnel.

The best are the people at XXXXX (resettlement agency). They are wonderful people...Our case manager, XXXXXX came here because I didn't even want to go out from my house. I was afraid so he came here and he was comforting me and telling me not to be afraid and everything will be ok and he took us. He taught us how to go on the bus. He took us to the library. He showed us the ways and how to go places and he was comforting me, telling me 'don't be afraid. You are under the protection of the United States' and he was very nice to us, very helpful.

She also highly extolled the IOM (International Organization for Migration), the agency which supported her family with their resettlement to the United States starting in Jordan.

The most wonderful thing I want to tell you is the way the organization took care of us. As soon as we were in the XXXXXX airport in Jordan we saw a man wearing a badge of IOM and he took care of us. He did our papers and he helped us. Then we went to the airport in Egypt and there was another one calling 'IOM IOM' and we went to him. He did everything for us. We didn't have to think of any responsibility. He did our papers and he took care of us. And then we came to XXXXX (U.S. city) and the same thing happened. Someone there from IOM, he took us and did everything we needed to do and

then we slept for a night there and they took care of us and then we went to XXXXX (U.S. city) and from there we came here. Everywhere there was someone who was responsible helping us and taking care of us. The organization took care of us as if we were a golden medal...It's beautiful! You feel you are precious. It's a beautiful feeling when you feel you are precious. You are cared for. You are important. Someone cares for you and when we came here we saw our case manager waiting for us. He even carried our bags. He didn't let us do anything...He took care of everything. They were wonderful. Beyond wonderful. In my whole life I have never felt so cared for. It's a beautiful feeling when you know that everywhere we went food was provided. I didn't even hold my passport. Everyone was doing everything for me, all my needs. And before that I was thinking 'What if we get hungry on the long journey? What if we get lost?' But none of this happened. Every minute we didn't have to think of anything. All our needs were met.

“The help we get is not what we thought we'd get”

Contrary to some families' favorable experiences with treatment and benefits presented in the previous section, several other families reported strong disappointment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment with the reception and treatment they had received since arriving and living in the United States. They provided specific illustrations of situations in which they felt that their basic physical and emotional needs had not been sufficiently met. Some examples included reduction in their food stamp allotments, placement in apartments in which the rent was substantially higher than they could afford, and significant pressure to begin working to meet financial obligations prior to recovering from traumatic experiences they had endured in Iraq.

Several participants also compared benefits that refugee families received in other host countries in Europe to those provided by the United States. The families who anticipated similar treatment here made comparisons that had set up them up for perhaps unrealistic and thus unmet expectations.

The father/husband in one family expressed disenchantment with and unrealistic expectations of benefits provided to them as refugees. He commented that paying a high price for airline tickets to come to the United States was a hardship for his family. "For us the price of the tickets that we came from Iraq to here...they could have not taken this from us because it's nothing for them." He also described his expectations and disappointment with the lack of support from governmental and NGO agencies and how overwhelmed his family felt as a result.

Coming from a country with...real hard times, we thought we will get a better response to our coming here. [We] would be better taken care of...The first thing for a refugee, because his new life is not yet secure,...his mind shouldn't be distracted in many ways. I have arrived here, I'm here for 40 days, and from the people I meet who are refugees who have arrived before us, they say that life here is not easy for them.

Additionally, he specifically described that his family's cash benefits and subsidies had been reduced to a level so low that their basic needs could be met.

For my family, we have arrived so recently and they already cut from the RCA (refugee cash assistance) that they give us...from each of my children because of the food stamps. I just arrived and I got a letter from DHS saying every one of my sons, because they are receiving RCA, \$100 is going down from their food stamps. So is every one of my sons is going to live with \$50 a month?

With regard to the apartment in which they were placed when they first arrived, he compared the benefits offered to refugees in the United States with those offered in other countries in Europe which he believed were more generous and stated that the resettlement agency “should have prepared for us a place to live, even if it is like this, but the government should pay for it at least.” He felt very disillusioned and unsupported by the experiences he had thus far since being in America and bitterly stated “There needs to be more taking care of the refugees. I believe that they are taking care of the refugees 15-20% only.” Similarly, his oldest son, while somewhat less bitter, also went on to echo his father’s sentiment about not receiving enough initial support as refugees.

I found that the assistance for us as refugees is very little. In our family all we get is the refugee cash assistance and the food stamps. From the start we just arrived, they cut the food stamps from me and my brother. We are without food stamps because we are getting the refugee cash assistance.

His brother echoed the disappointment in their benefits.

When we came here, we faced some hard things. We faced some things that were not the same as what we thought because we had relatives outside Iraq, and they used to tell us how good it is, but when we came here we saw the help we get is not what we thought we'd get. For example, me and my brother, we had our food stamps cut only because we get RCA...When I came here at least we thought that we'd have some time for rest, to relax from the situation we came from, like 6 months just to start to forget all of the things we faced, a time to rest, but this didn't happen.

The mother/wife in another family wife also disclosed disappointment with the quality of her life since coming to the United States, and particularly focused on a lack of freedom and a feeling of dependency since they did not own a car.

Life here is very difficult. It's not like we imagined it because people used to tell us 'Oh it's very easy here. It's very comfortable. Things are very good.' But when we came-since we came until now we are not settled. We are not comfortable and one of the things, we don't have a car here. It's not like there where we had a car. And here we need to go everywhere by buses and there are things we need to do. We are just tied. We can't go and do them.

She continued to describe how draining it was for her and her husband to get to English language class by public transportation and that the resettlement agency was unresponsive to her request for van transportation for herself and her fellow apartment complex residents.

A burden is the English classes on Monday and Wednesday. And that's because it's a 2 hour class, but we have to leave early in the morning and get back home at two and most of the time is on the buses. So by the time we get home, I'm so tired. So I told them that because there are a lot of people from XXXXX (apartment complex) going there, 'Why don't you get a minibus or something that will take us and bring us back?', but they didn't do anything. So that's a burden for me going- it makes me very tired on the buses.

Her husband also described the lack of support and benefits for refugees in the United States and his feelings about getting adjusted to their new life since arriving here.

When we come they know we have come from a very hard situation, from killing, from destruction, and we need some time to start watching how life is going here, to

understand and not worry about 'I need to work and pay the rent and these things.' So we need sometime so we can be settled. If I they give us a time, like 2 years not to think about the rent, because there are things that are more important like the language. So now my mind is distracted. Do I look for a job? Do I go and study English? And the rent is on my mind.

He compared benefits that refugees received in other countries to the treatment that his family received in the United States by describing the life of another Iraqi refugee family who had resettled in Finland.

I compare with the people I know who are living in other countries...I have a friend. Recently we were talking on the phone and he said 'Since I came here I don't have to worry about anything. I have my apartment and I have everything that I need. My kids go to school and they get paid. Every child gets support for what they need.'...He said 'I did not worry one day. I feel very safe and settled.' So my friend didn't have to worry about anything. If he didn't get a job at the beginning, as soon as he arrived for months and months, there was no problem because his rent, his electricity, all his bills were paid. And the government doesn't only supply the financial needs, but they take them to courses for training for jobs, teach them how to work, teach them the language, and make them join the community as if they are from the country, from the same country.

He projected that if his family had received similar benefits in the United States, "At least I will be sure that my family and our future-we will not have sudden situations that will shake our life." Additionally he suggested that the U.S. refugee resettlement agencies and policies take into

account the hardship from which refugees had come from in their countries and improve the programs designed to benefit them when they initially resettled.

If there will be a better program for the refugees because after all they are refugees- if there will be more help for them to feel settled, not forgetting that they have left their countries, their families, their people, and have come from very hard situations, so at least in the beginning they need some help, not stress. They need to be comfortable, not to start worrying how we are going to live...I wish there will be a program that is more studied, a better way to take care of the refugees when they come here so they can have an easier start, not to be stressed, to have a chance to learn things, and start things the right way and live worry free and peacefully.

Finally, while two daughter/sisters reported feeling supported by members of the local community and by the resettlement agency upon their family's arrival in the United States, their mother disclosed how she felt unsupported and disappointed particularly by the refugee resettlement agency. She expressed frustration with me for referring her to them for help. "You are saying that these people can help me. Will they pay my rent? Will they pay rent? They will not pay rent." She described being a mother to several children in a new country as a "very very difficult responsibility, not easy, especially you are in a strange place. You have no one near you." She continued to describe how she felt unsupported and disillusioned by the U.S. government and the entire country.

This is a country that wants from you not gives you...They want us to work but I can't work. People here, if you work you eat, if you don't work you don't eat, but I can't work. I'm tired. I can't and you have responsibilities...Everything is hard. There is nothing easy.

Everything is hard...Who will find help for me? XXXXX (resettlement agency) will not find a solution for me. Who will find a solution?

She tearfully expressed feeling a lack of assistance and support by saying “People think that they will come to America and they will rest, but there is no rest.”

“No one is taking care of this thing”

Several families disclosed that they came to live in the United States with the intent of seeking prompt and advanced medical attention for their loved ones that they could not obtain back in Iraq. These families either expected that they or their family member would make a complete recovery from their condition upon receiving treatment in the United States or that their medical condition would be given top priority by resettlement agency personnel and medical providers such that they would be evaluated and treated immediately upon arrival. However, these families’ hopes and expectations were not met and they expressed disappointment as they described a lack of response or a delayed response to their expressed needs for medical attention.

The mother/wife in one family expressed her disappointment and sadness about the lack of progress in her daughter’s improvement in her health since arriving and receiving treatment in the United States.

Here after all the treatment she is still not well. I think to myself even this didn't work.

What's going to happen?...I always think about her and I'm always worried. I am always sad. She is always on my mind. Always...Every mother, she has hopes for her children, especially the oldest. I always thought that I would see her grow up and graduate and get married and now I think will all these things happen or maybe not happen? She will not get well.

A son/brother in another family described concern and disappointment he and his family had about the lack of attention his younger brother received for his deteriorating vision.

I also worry about my younger brother who is blind in one eye and the other eye is also weak. We thought that the minute we got here, everyone would be so concerned about, this but we didn't see any care. When we tell them at XXXXXX (resettlement agency), they say 'Yes. Yes', but till now nothing is...no one is taking care of this thing.

His father described a similar response to their plea for treatment for their son's eyes. "When I came, I told them at XXXXX (resettlement agency) about it and they said 'Yes. Ok. We'll take care of it.' But until now nobody has asked or did anything."

The father/husband of another family who came to the United States expecting his wife to receive immediate treatment for her medical condition described how his and his wife's expectations were not met.

Although this is what we thought, until now nobody helped us with this...We felt disappointed, because until now we didn't get any help about this as we had thought...I had on my mind that as soon as we come here and they know about her situation, they're going to run with her to doctors and X-rays and everything and treat her, but nothing like this happened...I told them at XXXXXX (resettlement agency) and I told them at the health screening, when we went to the health screening, but there is no result.

His wife reported a similar experience with regard to the lack of attention paid to her medical condition.

XXXXXX (resettlement agency) wasn't treating us good. For instance, from the first day my husband told them and begged them 'Please my wife is suffering from her hands.

Help us,’ and they will say ‘Oh yes, yes we’re going to help you’ ...I’m talking about my situation, my sickness, but whenever we tell them, they say ‘yes’, but they have done nothing for me.

**“WE TRUST GOD WITH OUR LIFE”
(Religious Faith and Spirituality)**

“This is what God allowed”

Although some families were stricter in their religious observance than others, most of them described relying on their belief in God’s presence and power and their religious faith to support and protect them during trying periods. Additionally, their expressions of faith were consistent regardless of the particular religion or denomination which they practiced. Some families also reported utilizing their faith in God to make meaning of and to explain why they had endured such adverse experiences. Family members often concluded their narration of an undesirable event which had a favorable conclusion by expressing their gratitude to their higher power of choice by saying “thank God”, thus demonstrating their faith in their religion to protect and sustain them.

One father/husband, whose face had been permanently and completely disfigured as a result of suffering gunshot wounds in Iraq, described the first time he actually looked at his appearance after his injury. “There was the time that I had to get to the rest room by myself and I looked in the mirror. I was completely different but what can I do. This is what God allowed and I have to accept it.” Thus, he demonstrated his faith in God’s will which allowed him to accept what had happened to him no matter how horrifying it seemed to him and his family.

The mother in another family who was first widowed and then divorced also relied on her spiritual faith in accepting her fate to be a single mom raising two children on her own by saying

“It was normal because this is what God allowed.” Additionally, her daughter described what it was like for her to be able to help her family by working and supporting them in the United States. She revealed that one of her motivations to do so was to please God by saying “It will also make you feel that God is pleased with you.”

A daughter/sister in another family described an incident in which a very large truck bomb was set off near their family home in Iraq and all family members except one daughter were in the home at the time. The building was not structurally sound after the bombing and there was the threat of another bomb going off so all family members were evacuated safely from the home. However, the father refused to leave the home. The daughter stated “My dad stayed at home. He was praying and reading the Koran and then it passed safely thank God.” In this case, the father/husband in this family relied on his religious faith to protect himself and his family’s home.

A son/brother in another family described their reliance on faith in God to get through the trauma that the family had endured including the father’s kidnapping, and for recovery for his parents in the future since they had arrived in the United States.

I pray, I am praying and thanking god that my mom, that she will be better. She will have a better life here. Maybe she will improve, and just like in Iraq we used to say every day we trust God with our life and we are safe until now. Here also I am praying and asking God that he will arrange our future and we will have a better life. Even my mother and my father will be well and will have a happy life. Every day we say tomorrow is a better day...We pray and we thank God...God's kept us...We left Iraq [and] no one has lost his leg or no one was killed...What happened to my dad didn't happen to any of us, and we

were all safe and together when we left Iraq. The same way we trust God that things will be better for my mom and for the future here. Maybe He will put good people in our life who will help us. Maybe He will change the situation. We trust Him and depend on Him.

The father/husband in another family explained that he was able to face this major change in his and his family's life by relying on his religious faith. "I just trusted God and came... We know that God will not leave us in a bad situation, especially if we are good with people. We never hurt anyone so we know that God will never leave us."

Finally, the grandmother/mother in another family expressed how strongly she relied on her faith in God and prayer to keep her son and his family safe, particularly since she had already had one son die in the war in Iraq.

When he [her son] leaves home I pray for him and I say 'God be with you. May you go and come back safely'...and for my grandsons and for my daughter-in-law, I pray for all of them. Because they go by car, I ask god to help them...Even at home I sit and pray.

“What are your beliefs? What is your denomination?”

Some families described varied adverse experiences or the threat of such due to their religious beliefs while living in Iraq ranging from segregation in schools, prohibition of entrance to places of worship, forced divorce, or threat of personal physical violence. In addition, some families were willing to discuss openly their specific religion and denomination even when parents were of different faiths and they had a “mixed marriage.” In these families, the children identified with their fathers' denomination consistently. Other families were either unwilling to specify or chose not to affiliate with any particular sect of Muslim, but did not elaborate on their

choices. I perceived that this particular topic was private and off limits for further exploration in these cases.

When asked about to which sect of Islam a father/husband in one family belonged, he responded “This is something I don't like to talk about.” However, he continued by clarifying his reaction to the question.

I am Sunni and my wife is Shia, but for us we never thought who is Sunni and who is Shia? There is no difference. When we were trying to get married, we both come from families who don't make a difference. When they asked about me, they asked how I am, how my family is. They didn't ask ‘are you Sunni or Shia?’ And when I asked about her family, I asked about what kind of people they are. But now everyone is saying ‘I am Sunni’ and ‘I am Shia.’ So this is how we are. I am Sunni and my wife is Shia.

Although their difference in sects was not a concern to him or his wife, it did result in complications for him when he was kidnapped by terrorists in Iraq and his wife attempted to intervene with negotiations with the kidnappers to lower the ransom. Since she was a different sect than he was, the kidnappers demanded that he and his wife divorce.

My wife, because she is very kindhearted, she was trying to solve the problem on the phone in a better way. So she was telling them ‘I am just like you. Please help my husband. I am Shia like you.’ And this made the things get worse this time because they had asked for a \$100,000, and then with the begging and everything they came to \$50,000. So they knew my wife was Shia. They told me ‘OK. We will let you go with the \$50,000, but as soon as you leave here you have to divorce your wife.’ That was the agreement. If I accept that they can set me free.

Additionally, his son who identified as Sunni, but whose mother was Shia, responded similarly to his father with a lack of emphasis on differentiating when asked about his specific sect of Islam.

I personally don't make any difference. I don't mind. In Iraq, who knows me closely, they wouldn't even know what I am because I do the praying this kind and this kind, but the situation made us have the name, so I am Sunni.

He did however describe how his mixed family background increased his vulnerability to sectarian violence.

My name is related to both Shia and Sunni. My first name is related to Shia and my family name, my last name is related to Sunni. So if this group catches me they will kill me. If the other group catches me they will kill me.

The grandmother/mother in another family also talked about the suffering they endured and not being able to attend church in Iraq due to their strong Christian faith .

In Bagdad we suffered. We couldn't go to church. There were both Sunni and Shia against us. Near our house there was the Shia. Near the church there were the Sunnis. And they wouldn't let us go to church because in our area the people were Shia and they wouldn't let us go near the Sunni...We were sad. We wanted to pray. We suffered.

A daughter/sister in another family who was Shiite Muslim described the threat of violence that they faced when going into an area dominated by Sunni Muslims.

Sometimes in the evenings my brother would want to go out with his friends and my mom would worry. She would say 'Oh please!' because he used to go some areas with

his friends that are Sunni areas that are not safe for him and my mom will keep telling us

‘Get your brother back. Call him! Let him come!’

The father/husband in another family described how his daughters would not be subjected to religious and sectarian segregation in school in the United States as had been the case for them in Iraq.

They will be just like the other children here at school and no one will ask them ‘What are your beliefs? What is your denomination?’ Like it is back there back there...There the schools are by areas. Every area has its own school and there are schools that are for Shia. There are schools that are for Sunni.

Although both he and his wife identified as Muslims, when asked about his sect, he deflected the question and responded “Which type? I'm just Muslim.” Similarly, when his wife was asked about which sect she followed, she politely inquired ‘Do I have to say that?’ indicating that she did not want to reveal her specific beliefs as well.

Finally, a mother in another family who identified as Muslim was very adamant about not affiliating with any particular sect of Islam when asked about her denomination. “Although I don't like to make this difference, my dad is Sunni and my mom is Shia.” She responded “No. Not at all” when asked if she practiced one or the other. Similarly her daughter responded to the same question about a specific denomination with “None of them. I'm just a Muslim.”

“THE FAMILY IS OUR BACKBONE” (Family Bonding)

“We had to unite”

Most families had one or more members who described their nuclear family as becoming closer, more unified, and more supportive of each other either during the pre-, trans-, or post-

migration period. In general, families realized that they needed to operate in more cooperative ways since they had experienced such adverse conditions in Iraq and were facing such drastic changes in living conditions and ways of life by resettling in the United States. By becoming closer, more compassionate towards each other, more inclusive, and by assisting each member, these families felt better equipped to face and overcome the challenges that they encountered irrespective of the family size or atmosphere. Additionally, they experienced more joy and satisfaction and less disappointment and sadness when all members of a family not included in an activity or “on board” with a decision.

A son/brother in one family described his family becoming closer and more united as a result of their resettlement experiences as refugees.

Living in a country like that with everything, terrorist groups everywhere, and the government helping the terrorist groups to put terror in the peoples' lives, even if the family is not in one mind together but facing these situations, you will be more united and would want to leave...As a family facing hardship and hard times, we had to unite and especially having come here as refugees. And we know that in this country, you don't get help from others so you have to be more united to help each other. If you need something, maybe they can help you in a small way, but after all, you have to get together to help each other.

A son/brother in another family described how highly he valued family, and his parents in particular, are for him as an Iraqi refugee.

We have learned in our country generation after generation that your family is the most important thing for you...They are my father and mother and they are everything to me. I

love them and if something happened to them I would be so lonely. I would be lost...It's not that I need them. I can live by myself, but I don't feel comfortable being without them.

Unlike other families in the study who tended to be larger, the daughter/sister in another family expressed a strong sense of cohesiveness and familial responsibility for herself and her single mom due to the small size of their family and the lack of a father figure both before and after resettlement. First, she described what it was like for her to be raised by only her mother in Jordan.

Because I had a strong mom, she fills the space. She was a mother and a father and a sister and brother so I didn't feel it much. But still there will be a small space that you feel there is someone missing, especially at the times when I am weak, I feel that more. But mom was sufficient for me.

She clarified her meaning of the times when she was “weak” as

the time where we feel that there is a lot of responsibilities and ...we have to do everything by ourselves- me and my mom. We feel that we wish there was someone there to do it with us or do it for us...sometimes we feel ‘What if there was someone to do the things and we will just relax and be comfortable?’

However, she also stated that her family had become accustomed to and appreciated the intimacy of its small size. “It's a nice feeling that we are not a big family. We are just three.”

A daughter/sister in another family described prior to coming to the United States that her father encouraged her family to focus on supporting each other.

When we decided to come, my dad he gathered us all and he said 'This is an opportunity that we got that many of the Iraqis don't have. So we have to take it and make the best of it, and we have to stick together, be always together as a family. And help each other and everyone, whatever they need. We can help each other inside our family.'

She elaborated on what "sticking together" meant for her family in the United States and how essential it was to her family that all members felt included and supported.

If anyone of the family would just leave and not be with us we would feel emotionally hurt, because in Iraq we were used to living together doing things together and helping each other, so if it changed here that would be hurtful for us. We don't want anyone from the family to go and be by themselves and then the rest would feel it's hard... We worry about that person who left... Because he'll be by himself and will not be able to make decisions and it is inside the family so that's something that makes you sad.

She also described the sadness and disappointment her family felt when every member of the family was not able to attend and enjoy an outing together since coming to the United States due to the limitation of the size of their car and the fact that all family members were not able to fit in it at any given time.

Even our car, it's not enough for all of the family so if we need to go somewhere, it's either we have to ask one of the neighbors to go with us. Some of us will go in their car or some of the family needs to stay. Sometimes my mom will say 'I'm not coming so that others can go.' That will make us feel disappointed. We are ready to go to a picnic or somewhere with the family to have some nice time and then we have to leave some of the

family members at home. That will make us sad. It will not make our happiness completed.

Finally, the father/husband in another family illustrated the great value that Iraqis place on their families and the support provided by them. “Back there we say that the family is our backbone. They always supply us, support us.”

“He has no one but me, so we got closer”

Several spouses described becoming more supportive, more cooperative and spending more time together since they resettled in the United States. This experience was particularly common for families in which one spouse suffered from a medical condition which rendered him or her unable to consistently carry out daily tasks and familial responsibilities. In this case, the healthier spouse took over responsibilities and offered assistance to his or partner in need. Spouses also described feeling closer to each other or assisting with tasks that they might not have otherwise due to the absence of extended family here. They also described this increased closeness as being positive and beneficial for both their marriage and their family.

The wife/mother in one family described the increase in closeness between her and her husband and their reliance on each other due to the absence of extended family.

I feel the relationship with my husband is better here because when we were in Iraq, he had all his family, his brothers, his family who could help him, but here he has no one but me, so we got closer...After these last surgeries he had, there was no one but me. I did everything for him. I clean him, wash him, be with him, take care of him, feed him.

Everything, it's just me, but in Iraq others helped with all of these things so of course now

we are closer to each other. And not only this. We are always together, me and him me and him all the time so this also makes the relationship better.

She went on to elaborate that as her husband's physical condition had improved since coming to the United States, not only were they spending more time together, but also he was working with her in new ways as well.

I have to be with him, but we always do things together. We are always doing things together. Here he takes us to all the doctor's appointments. He has to take us and to the shopping he has to take us, but I'm always with him. First, because my English is better so we help each other. We're together and our appointments. Everything we do together.

The mother/wife in another family, who suffered from a medical condition that was painful and debilitating at times, described how her husband supported her and assisted her with activities of daily living and chores that she could not always do by herself.

When I have the pain...my husband helps me do things because even if I go to the restroom, I cannot help myself because my hands don't move. Here if I wash a few dishes, then I will feel- there still is pain in my fingers, but sometimes it gets worse. And the clothes, if I need to wash some clothes and not go to the laundry because it's a few pieces, I just do it very slightly and my husband has to squeeze them and do the hard work.

The mother/wife in another family also described the increased support and cooperation she had received from her husband since their family resettled in the United States.

My husband supported me very much...My husband is always supportive since we got married. Now he always encourages me and supports me in every way...One of the

things is driving. I was afraid and he always encouraged me and told me 'don't be afraid. You can do it' and now I can drive...Back there he didn't help with the baby, but here he is even helping with the baby because he can see that I have no one else...I feel that we help each other. He helps me.

She also stated that she and her husband had gotten closer since coming to live in the United States. "Me and my husband, we love each other, and back there we used to support each other, when we came here this came closer and I felt his love and support more." Additionally, her husband described how he was supportive of his wife and children when they were initially frightened when they first arrived here. "When they are afraid, I tell them 'Don't worry, I am here. I am with you. I am for you.' So things are better now."

The father/husband in another family expressed his devotion to his wife and his concern for her well-being after he realized that he may have upset her if she overheard some disturbing content that he described during our interview. At one point his eyes welled up with tears.

My wife, when she hears all these stories or remembers, she gets a nightmare. She feels she is living in a nightmare and maybe my voice was loud and I shouldn't have let her even stay in the house because she gets upset when she hears this...Sometimes she gets hysterical and cries and sometimes she just sits in a corner for days with few things to eat and she keeps crying and crying all the time. And I have to take care of her and calm her down. And I am already stressed and tired, but what can I do? I have to take care of her. However, he finally smiled when he lovingly spoke of his wife. "She's my wife and the mother of my children and tomorrow is our wedding anniversary."

“He calls me mom”/ “Paying back to them”

Children in several families described their taking on caregiving and parenting roles for their younger siblings, as well as feeling responsible for “paying back” to their parents who had worked tirelessly to provide for them over many years. During the difficult times that these families had experienced back in Iraq or other countries that offered them “temporary shelter” some children took over for their parents in caring for or mentoring their younger siblings in their parents absence. Other children who were more mature or who had more life experience particularly with pursuing advanced education or employment outside of the home offered their support, guidance, and wisdom to their siblings on these matters as well. Children in some families also described their desire to show their appreciation to their aging parents who had made sacrifices for them and cared for them by reciprocating. Towards this end, they intended to take on additional responsibilities by advancing their education and working to financially support their parents and younger siblings in the United States and share the roles that their parents had previously filled when they lived in Iraq.

The oldest son/brother in one family described his taking on the role of caretaker/mentor for his younger brothers.

My other younger brothers, I also have a good relationship with them, but sometime I am strict with them. I get angry, not because I don't love them, but because I want to advise them or discipline them or teach them something.

His younger brother described how his older brother supported him during stressful times in Iraq. “My older brother was always standing by me, helping me, comforting me because I was younger, I was little at that time and he was a great help during those hard times.”

A daughter/sister in another family also described how she and her siblings supported and guided each other emotionally both in Iraq and now since they have been living in the United States.

We talk a lot. Me and my brother. I ask him 'What do you want? What are your goals?

What do you want to do?' And we talk with each other. And we have this habit in the family that all sisters and brother, we sit together and we talk. We tell each one of us, we tell each other 'You need to do this. It's better for you to do that. You need to change this habit or that's a good thing for you.' We talk.

Additionally, her sister explained that she and her siblings felt a responsibility to support their parents now that they have left Iraq and come to live in the United States.

All our lives my dad used to work and support us and my mom also helped us... my mom always encouraged me and us...Although she didn't work outside, but they were there for us. So now my dad is old and he's tired so it is the time for us to do our best and study and then work to be able to help them.

The grandmother/mother in another family who had been widowed and came to the United States to resettle with her adult son and his family reflected on how well her son treated and cared for her. When asked to describe what it was like with her to live with her son she said "Thank god, very nice. Very good. There is no one like my son."

A daughter/sister in another family elaborated on her role as a daughter and described that she felt the need to pay back her mom by taking care of her as she ages.

It's a hard thing to be a daughter because when you grow up you have to pay back the favors that they have done for you...As we grow they grow too so they will be in an age

that they cannot do things for themselves and it's the time that they are going to need us, so taking care of them and being nice to them and seeing all their needs is the paying back to them.

Additionally, this daughter also described her role of being a “mom” to her younger brother since she was his only sibling and their mother was single and had to work to support them.

A sister is a mother...The sister, especially since I'm the only sister and I'm the oldest, would be like a mother. If the mom is at work the sister will take care. I take care of my brother. I see what he wants to eat. I'll bath him. I'll take care of him. So I will be a second mom to him...Since he was born, my mom was at work most of the time and he was with me. He used to call me mom. Even now as he is more grown, sometimes he forgets and he calls me mom.

**“WHAT WILL THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?”/“WE CAME TO THE UNKNOWN”
(Fear and Apprehension about the Future)**

Most of the families described experiencing varying degrees of fear, apprehension, and uncertainty about their future life here in the United States before or after they arrived to begin their new lives. Some families articulated fears about their physical safety from the threat of physical danger and violence due to preconceived ideas they had developed from viewing American movies. Some families expressed concerns about not being accepted and being ridiculed due to their unique ethnic and religious appearance, practices, and beliefs. Other families described apprehension and anxiety about the great changes to their usual day-to-day existence which they were facing by coming to live in their new homeland and their lack of familiarity with the American way of life. Finally, some expressed doubts about their ability to

financially support their families here and thus about their decision to bring their families to the United States to resettle.

A son/brother in one family expressed concern about his future. “This is my new life here in America. I don't know what is going to happen in the future, but I know it's a hard life, not an easy life.” His brother expressed similar concerns about the future for himself and his family.

When we came here we saw that we were facing another kind of difficulty and that's worry about the future. We don't know what's going to happen. We know that we are going to work, but what's going to happen after that? Is this going to be enough? What will the future look like?...My mom, my dad, everyone's stressed again, but for other reasons, for being worried about the future.

The father/husband in this family simply stated with a heavy heart “We are very tired from one worry to another worry. We don't know what we will see in our life.” He also described his worry about his younger sons’ treatment by other students when they attended public school since they were Arab and Muslim.

The only thing I'm worried about in school is not the education, but I am worried if they will not be accepted from the other kids because they are from another country. They have different names and different religion and maybe they will not feel accepted from the other kids. They might be bullied in some way.

The mother/wife in another family expressed similar apprehension and concern about her family being accepted and fitting into American culture due to their outwardly different appearance and behaviors including Muslim dress, religious practices, and language.

I was worried about the way I dress, about the scarf I wear. I used to say how are they going to accept me the way I am? And I had worries about our way of living. How are we going to be able to live in a new place?

Her husband expressed similar concerns about his family.

I thought it was going to be very hard because of the different culture and the way we dress and the way we live...We thought that my wife, the way she dresses, is going to be a problem because she wears the scarf and the black thing that's called *abaya* and the long robe and we thought that people are going to make fun out of this and laugh when they see this and also about our daughter because she wears the same.

A daughter/sister in another family described her family's fear and anxiety about the unknown and uncertainty about coming to the United States.

It was very scary and hard for us, that we're going to a strange new country and I was thinking that it's going to be scary go there with my family that we know nobody and how will people accept us in this foreign country?

She went on to describe the anxiety about not being accepted by people here once they arrived.

It was scary. We don't know how life is here and how people live and what we have to do and would people accept us? And specially that we had already left our country for safety reasons, purposes and so it was scary for us not knowing what will happen here...Not everyone likes strangers to come to their country and live there and get crowded.

Her sister described how her family had discussed their future when they were able to leave Iraq and come to the United States.

We'll talk with each other and sometimes talk about how life will be when we come here because we already knew that we were coming or even sometimes think what will we do if we couldn't come here because we weren't for sure.

She described the uncertainty that the family lived with for quite a while in Iraq with regard to whether they would actually be allowed to leave Iraq and also if they would be accepted here.

We had in our mind that we are coming, but because it took a long time, we didn't know whether it was going to happen or not. So in that time, because we were waiting and didn't know, in the beginning we thought as soon as we apply they are going to take us. Still we had thought that maybe anytime they will call us and tell us that we are accepted and we can go. So we used to talk about how we are going to live if we get to the States. So in those 5, 6 years our mind was always not settled because we didn't know what was going to happen so it was not a stable time for us.

She also described her fears about living in the United States which originated from watching American movies.

I sometimes am afraid from people...who might attack me or hurt me in any way because I had this idea in my mind that this could happen here...Because of the movies I watch, I sometimes think even I might be walking in the street and someone would attack me and want to kill me. Or maybe on the bus.

The mother/wife in this family also described her apprehension about living in the United States.

Here I am not comfortable. It's difficult, very difficult...I don't like to be in a foreign place...I get scared from the unknown...I don't know what their future will be...We came to the unknown and I don't know what's going to happen.

The father/husband in another family disclosed his doubt and worry about his family's unknown and uncertain future by coming to and living in the United States.

On my mind was the experience and the difficulty I might face because this is something I'm going to an unknown. I'm still worried about my family and what's going to happen...I am trying to ask people who have arrived before us to find something that will make me have hope and be patient.

He also revealed that he is trying to mask his concern, anxiety, and doubt about the future from his family.

I'm trying to be very normal in front of my family, in front of the kids, but I worry with myself...I worry am I going to be able to work and supply their needs? Am I going to get the right job to be able to take care of them? This is all in my mind. Without exaggerating I recently started thinking, let me take them all and go back...And then I will say 'No. Let me be patient. Let me give a chance to my daughters. As long as they have good schools to continue for their future and I will try to wait and see for things to get better.'

This father/husband continued to question whether or not he made the right decision to bring his family to live in the United States.

Sometimes I think with myself 'Was I wrong? Did I take the wrong decision? Did I have to think of something else, another way?' I also think maybe I should have chosen somewhere else because I had the chance to. Somewhere where, if I work that's good. Then I can support my family and if I didn't work, I would not have to worry because I know all their needs are met...I don't know about life here. Maybe in one year I will have

different thinking. I will have different ideas after things will work for me...But this is what I'm thinking now.

His wife expressed similar sentiments about the unknown future. "Everyone is telling us that it's the first year that is difficult and then later things are going to be easier for you."

The father/husband in another family described his and his family's initial fear and apprehension about the unknown upon arriving to live in the United States.

At the beginning we were scared because we didn't know what is hidden for us. It was a new place, so we didn't know what's going to happen and we were scared...We see in the movies, suddenly a gang will come and they have weapons and break into a house...At the beginning my wife was afraid to open the door for anyone, and then we saw how it is here and the life, now she is not afraid anymore.

His wife similarly described her initial apprehension about coming to a new country where she didn't know anyone.

I was very nervous because I was feeling that I'm going to a place where I know nobody because I don't have any friends or family in this state and I had so many questions with no answers on my mind so I was very nervous and scared...In the beginning I was very scared. I couldn't even sleep and if he would leave the house, my husband, I was scared to stay by myself. I would tell him don't leave me alone.

The daughter/sister in another family described her preconceived ideas about life in the United States as that it would be scary and dangerous prior to coming to live here.

We had some fear about the American people, especially back there they used to scare us about the black people. All Arab countries, all the Arab world, they have got this

impression that black people are bad and that's because in all the movies, the black people are the wicked people. So we had the idea that black people can hurt, can rape, can kill. They do all the bad things.

She also described the family's anxiety and fear based on others' negative reports related to being able to successfully make a life in the United States.

The fear was that we would come and then we will not be able to make it. We will not be able to live the right life, take the right decisions because we have heard about lots of people who came and they were failures. They didn't succeed. They didn't make it here. So we thought what if things would be hard for us? What if we won't be able to do the right things or take the right decisions? My mom had always kept us in the right place...We had a good reputation. And we were afraid that if we come here, we couldn't stay in that standard.

Additionally, she disclosed that even though her family was abandoned by her step-father in Jordan, they still feared that he might return to the United States to reclaim his son [her brother] and create difficulty for her family.

The thing we are afraid of is because he has also papers for coming here, so we are afraid that he will come sometime and make some trouble for us. We don't want him to come...So now we don't want him to come and then suddenly he will say 'I have a son' or make trouble for us.

Finally, she stated "We still haven't got to know a lot about the country...There's a lot still ahead of us." Her mother described her fear about coming to live here with regard to protecting her children in a new country. "When we first came, I was very tired emotionally and afraid because

I am the mom. I am the one responsible.” She also described being anxious about living in a new country with which she was not familiar. “I have lived for long time in Jordan and I was used to the routine, the way of life in Jordan. I was afraid from the change.”

Thematic Structure

The relationship between the themes discussed above describes the overall experience of resettlement for these Iraqi refugee families. Loss associated with trauma was the most central and over-arching theme for these families and was directly related in some form with every other theme. Loss of many aspects of these families’ lives associated with the trauma they had experienced prior to arriving in the United States was largely a part of the need to leave the danger and terror for safety and peace. Loss of the refugee families’ ability to financially support themselves once in the United States was related to a lack of hope and fear and apprehension about the future. Loss of extended family and friends left behind in Iraq was related to their nuclear family becoming more closely bonded and feeling supported or in some cases unsupported by the local community. Loss of their cultural context and their “average expectable environment” (Hartmann, 1939), defined as familiarity with and predictability of day-to-day life in their homeland, by coming to the United States was part of their reliance on and connections with religious communities and faith. Some also described a lack of hope and feeling a lack of support due to disappointment with refugee benefits and services available to their families.

Some refugee families’ reliance on religious faith and spirituality to make meaning of negative events and for strength to sustain them was related to hope that they held. Their involvement in the church community and their faith in God were both related to the support that they experienced. Families described closer bonding related to their leaving danger for safety.

Families needed to unify to make the decision to resettle and to prepare to physically leave their homeland. They also had to work cooperatively once here to make a successful effort at resettlement. Family bonding and changes in roles were related to the lack of support from refugee benefits and services that some families experienced. It was also to compensate for other family members whose debilitating medical conditions rendered them unable to carry out their own responsibilities and was part of the lack of support and lack of attention to their medical needs.

Families described leaving their homeland due to danger to come here for safety as being related to their hopes for a better future for themselves and their children, as well as hopes for superior medical care. However, it was also a part of lack of hope due to limited educational and employment opportunities for young adult children who had invested time and energy into education and earning degrees that were not being recognized here. Even though their leaving danger for safety initially appeared to be a positive change for these families, it was also part of their fear and apprehension about their future because of the uncertainty associated with resettlement.

The families' reception of support both from the local community in the form of friendliness, kindness, and assistance in addition to their satisfaction with refugee benefits and treatment by governmental and NGOs was related to their hope that their lives would improve as they rebuilt them here. Analogously, their experience with a lack of support from fellow Iraqi or Arab neighbors, discontentment with the benefits and treatment availed to them as refugees and lack of response to their medical needs were all a part of their experiencing a lack of hope for their future life here in the United States. Finally, some families' experiences of lack of support

due to disillusionment with benefits and treatment as refugees, as well as disappointment with lack of attention to medical needs was related to their fear and apprehension for what their lives would be like in the future. Overall, these refugee families were struggling to establish a physical and emotional place in which they could feel secure and settled.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

Primary Conclusions

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the results of my study. First, loss associated with traumatic events was central for all families. Some families described experiencing more extensive trauma than others, and some more recently than others, but every family described experiencing loss that was associated with some sort of traumatic event in Iraq.

A second conclusion was that most of the families described experiencing “two sides of a coin” for several themes and subthemes. Sometimes these almost paradoxical experiences were across families and sometimes they were within the same family. These paradoxes were also expressed differently by individual family members during the course of their interview. During some moments they described some aspect of life that had improved for them in the United States, but at other moments they described some aspect of life that was more challenging for them since coming to the United States. It is important to note that even if families were dissatisfied with several aspects of their current situation in the United States, they still reported feeling safer. Moreover, while they reported feeling safer, at some times their experiences of loss were so profound that they expressed doubt about whether resettlement had been worth it for them.

Related to the previous conclusion, a third conclusion was that even though numerous families described feeling relief from constant threats to their physical well-being and from dangerous conditions from which they escaped in Iraq, they described experiencing a new type of stress and fear once in the United States. This stress associated with resettlement was described as being related to the trajectory of their sense of their future and their concerns and

worries about how they were going to support themselves in their host country and build a new life in a new culture. Thus, it seemed like their stress had transformed from fear, which focused on physical threats in Iraq, to anxiety related to their social and educational well-being in the United States. However, they were none the less troubling to them. Not all families experienced this particular shift. Each family's overall experience seemed to be influenced by several factors including individual perspectives, philosophical positions, and family perceptions and meanings.

A fourth conclusion was that time was not as influential a factor in the process of resettlement as was expected for the range of time that the families in this study had been living the United States. It did not appear to be primary to the descriptions of the resettlement experience among these families. For example, one family who had only been in the United States 2 months described having a mostly difficult time and being dissatisfied with its life in the United States thus far. On the other hand, another family who had been here approximately the same length of time described having a mostly positive experience and being satisfied with its life in the United States thus far. Moreover, another family who had been here for a longer length of time, described feeling settled and satisfied with its ability to support themselves financially, where as another family that had been in the United States for a similar length of time felt extremely anxious and lacked confidence about its ability to financially meet the family's needs. However, time may be a more relevant factor when families' resettlement processes are studied over a longer time frame than was done in the present study.

A fifth conclusion was that families' expectations about how life was going to be for them in the United States were not always aligned with their actual experiences, and often their inaccurate expectations were related to feelings of fear and/or disappointment. For example,

numerous families discussed being initially afraid because they were expecting dangerous conditions from violence like that often depicted in American movies that they had viewed previously to coming to the United States. When they arrived however, after they had experienced positive feelings of safety, they eventually felt secure and less fearful. Additionally, some families had the ill-conceived impression from other people in Iraq that they would receive immediate attention to and relief from debilitating medical conditions, but instead they experienced delays or lack of improvement, which led to disappointment for these families.

A sixth conclusion was that refugee families who had either male or female members with post-secondary education who had worked in professional fields prior to resettlement had difficulty adjusting to their loss of occupational and social status. Thus, they described being unhappy accepting employment in less professional, lower paying positions. These under employed individuals struggled with being able to sufficiently contribute to the financial support of their family. Whereas families who had members who had less education or who had experienced working in unskilled jobs in Iraq described more readily accepting employment in lower paying jobs once in the United States.

A seventh conclusion was that the participants who were parents generally talked mostly about their older children whose educational path once in the United States was less clear. Their younger children had not invested as much time in their studies and choices as their older children had in Iraq, so they had less to lose and more time to pursue educational opportunities and professions in this country. These families described facing more challenges and fewer options as far as their young adult children either completing their secondary education or

furthering their post-secondary education once in the United States. These concerns about young adult children seemed to create a substantial amount of stress for the entire family.

The unmarried young adult refugees aged 18-25 years old described being confused and discouraged about “where to go next” and having the most difficulty with redefining their roles and goals during resettlement in the United States. According to them and their parents, they experienced the greatest loss of time invested in education and/or work experience after leaving Iraq. These young adults, while discouraged, seemed generally to be more resilient and open to modifying their plans and life trajectories to reach their goals than were their parents. However, their parents had more intense distress and were sometimes bitter about the loss of the investment of time, money, sacrifice, and energy that they and their children had made in order to pursue their education back in Iraq.

These families highly valued the pursuit of education, particularly for their children, and saw it as the path to a brighter future. While they had high hopes for the continuation of their child’s post-secondary education in the United States, they frequently described challenges and barriers to educational opportunities here. Lack of English language proficiency and lack of recognition of previously earned credits and degrees in Iraq were the biggest obstacles that they described.

An eighth conclusion was that most families acknowledged that improving their knowledge of the English language would increase their level of independence, self-sufficiency, and lessen their feelings of isolation. Consequently, most of the families described their experiences with attempts to improve their English either by attending ESL classes or having tutors come to their homes to help them learn English. Their efforts to improve their English not

only seemed to serve as an activity to fill their days and focus their attention, but also served as a source of social engagement for some of these families. They would interact not only with each other, but also with other members of the community with whom they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to interact.

A ninth conclusion was that participants described some differences in family members' descriptions of resettlement experiences associated with gender. Women tended to emphasize the relief of living in a physically safer environment and described an improved quality of life for them and their family in the United States. However, they also described the emotional pain of the loss of their family members left behind. Men tended to describe more concerns about being able to provide financially for their families and about their future occupationally after arriving in the United States.

The tenth conclusion drawn was that while many families described experiencing religious sectarianism back in Iraq, none of the families disclosed experiencing this phenomenon since living in the United States. However, some family members did describe experiencing a lack of support from fellow Iraqi refugees and Arab members of the local community. These results seemed puzzling so I wondered if the lack of support from fellow Iraqis/Arab was a function of sectarian responses and that the participants were hesitant to share with me. Their lack of speaking openly about these issues may have been due to concern that I would judge them and stereotype their behavior as "racist." However, perhaps these issues did not stand out in their lived experiences.

Furthermore, families described having concern and anxiety about "standing out" and receiving attention from Americans due to their unique appearance, beliefs, and behaviors

coming from their Iraqi/Muslim backgrounds. However, they did not describe or were not aware of actually experiencing any negative attention or anti-Arab/anti-Muslim treatment from Americans while living in the United States. This result was also surprising to me because I would have expected some of the families to have experienced such treatment since they had resettled in a relatively homogeneous community with a limited Arab presence.

Links between Theoretical Perspectives and Findings

Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)

There were numerous clear links between the theoretical perspectives guiding this study and these findings. On an individual level, the perspective of COR theory was clearly linked to the conclusions that (1) loss was a central theme for all family members on some level, (2) there was a shift from relief from fear of danger to anxiety about supporting themselves in the United States, (3) family members with post-secondary education and professional careers had difficulty in adjusting to their loss of social status, and (4) families talked more about their young adult children than their younger children after resettlement. According to Hobfoll (1991, 2001, 2014), the circumstances and contexts under which the loss of resources, as well as the extent of the loss of their resource caravan occurred were related to the degree of traumatic stress response that the individuals experienced. Furthermore, the stress level experienced by individual family members influenced the level of stress experienced by the entire family. As predicted by this theory, families that were able to aggregate sufficient personal, social, or material resources upon resettlement after their loss, regardless of the extent of trauma they experienced, seemed to adjust better and experience less stress than those that were not as capable or fortunate enough to do so.

For example, a father/husband had experienced a severely traumatic, debilitating, and disfiguring injury in Iraq that led to him losing his good health, ability to work and financially support his family, and his identity to some extent. However, as a result of his injury, he and his family received the most monetary support and government benefits of any family in this study once they arrived in the United States. Thus, he and his wife expressed the most satisfaction and the least concern about financially supporting themselves of any of the families. They were not only able to acquire material resources, but also personal resources such as their strong religious faith, positive trajectories for their young school-aged children, and social resources such as their close family bonding and support of each other. Their resource caravan was sufficient enough to lessen the blow of the severe traumatic loss experienced by the entire family.

Other families who had also experienced traumatic loss in terms of direct exposure to long-term danger and violence in Iraq described having great difficulty adjusting during resettlement. Members of these families experienced severe enough losses such that their resource caravans had not been replenished in the time that they had been living in the United States. The father/husband in one family described the loss of college educations and professional careers for his young adult children and his and his wife's medical condition and inability to work due to them which developed as a result of the stress of the violence in Iraq. The mother/wife in another family described her loss of family and friends and a familiar way of life left behind in Iraq, along with affordable housing, as well as the loss of time and investment in her husband and young adult children's education and careers in Iraq. Both of these individuals, and thus their families, were continuing to experience severe traumatic stress

responses because their resource caravans had not been sufficiently replenished since living in the United States.

With regard to material resources, these families and most of the other families in the study received the standard financial benefits provided to refugees by the government which was often not sufficient to meet their basic living expenses, particularly if they were unable to work or they were working at low paying jobs. Additionally, these family members were not experiencing sufficient support from the local community and resettlement services to compensate for the loss of support they experienced by leaving their homeland. Finally, at this point in time at least, their religious faith did not seem strong enough to supply them with the strength they required to endure this stressful period of resettlement.

Acculturative Stress (AS) Model

Also on an individual level, the AS Model posited by Williams and Berry (1991) was clearly linked to several findings in this study. This model described the factors that contributed to the level of AS due to the changes experienced when living in a culture different than one was accustomed to. It was linked to the findings that (1) time was not as influential a factor in the resettlement process, (2) expectations were not always consistent with actual experiences, (3) English language knowledge was critical for a sense of independence and self-sufficiency, (4) the existence of religious sectarianism among Iraq refugees and in the United States was not specifically disclosed by family members, and (5) families did not describe experiencing anti-Arab/anti-Muslim treatment in the United States. One aspect of this model that influenced the level of stress for an individual was mode of acculturation. Those refugees who pursued integration once in their new homeland were minimally stressed, those who felt marginalized and

sought to remain separate were highly stressed and those who assimilated experienced an intermediate level of stress.

The findings from this study seemed generally consistent with these predictions. The family members who described making an effort to “mix” with members of the local community from other cultures including Americans, learn English, and adapt to American ways of life, while still upholding their core beliefs and values embedded in their Iraqi culture described being the most satisfied and the least stressed. However, those family members who had limited interaction with and exposure to American life or people did not attempt to learn English, and thus felt isolated in the United States as a result described feeling increased stress. However, contrary to this model, the family members that described embracing American culture and values wholeheartedly and desiring to assimilate as quickly as possible such that they described striving to be ‘Americans’ did not describe feeling stressed about their immersion into the new culture and actually seemed less stressed than those who were attempting to integrate. One explanation for this apparent contradiction is that these individuals described having had extensive exposure to American culture prior to arriving to the United States, so they were more familiar and perhaps more comfortable with it which served to lower their stress levels. Another explanation may have been that though they may have appeared to be assimilating from their description of their experiences, they may have actually been upholding more of their core beliefs from their Iraqi culture than they divulged.

Another dimension of the model that was linked to this study’s findings was that this model predicted that Iraqi refugees who lived in a community that did not have an extensively established Iraqi or Arab cultural network, was not relatively ethnically and culturally diverse,

and did not demonstrate an openness to tolerance and cultural diversity would experience a higher level of AS. While family members' experienced varying levels of AS, according to their descriptions of their experiences, none of them described or attributed their struggles with adjustment or adaptation with life in America to an intolerance, lack of acceptance, or lack of support from Americans in their community. Additionally, the one family in the study who was of the Chaldean ethnicity and of the Christian faith was the only family who described feeling disconnected from their ethnic and religious group where they were currently living. Since they were the only Iraqi refugee family in this study that was not Arab or Muslim, and thus part of an even smaller minority in the local community than the other families, it was not surprising that they described these feelings and experienced increasing stress as a result.

Finally, the AS model posited that one's perception of the acculturation process and one's coping skills, in addition to one's realistic expectations of their resettlement experience and prior knowledge of English also contributed to the level of AS that individuals experienced. According to the family members' descriptions, I would suggest that these factors seemed to be the most significant contributors to individuals levels of AS. Those who had a higher levels of English language knowledge, described a positive perspective of the acculturation process, or whose expectations were more aligned with actual experiences described lower levels of AS than did those who had less English language knowledge, had a negative perspective of the acculturation process, and whose expectations were not aligned with actual experiences.

Contextual Model of Family Stress

The extent of stress experienced by individual family members during forced migration and resettlement, some of which was illustrated by the previous two models, contributed to the

level of stress experienced by the entire family. Consequently, the variations in individual refugees' adjustments contributed to the degree of stress that the family experienced upon its resettlement. The more stress each family member perceived, the more stress the family as a whole experienced (Boss, 2002).

Boss's (2002) Contextual Model of Family Stress and the concepts incorporated in it were linked to numerous conclusions in this study. Boss's (1999) concept of ambiguous loss was clearly linked to the conclusion that the theme of loss was central for all of the refugee families in the study, including the struggle with the loss of social status among more highly educated families and the loss of time and money invested educationally and occupationally for young adult children. Loss for these families occurred on multiple levels from concrete loss of family and friends, homes, and possessions to more abstract losses such as the ability to financially support themselves, and a clear sense of independence, identity, social status, and their homeland. Ambiguous loss describes losses that are not clearly defined and families that do not have definite answers about the state or condition of the people who have been lost. As predicted by Boss (1999), families who suffered a greater extent of ambiguous loss, as opposed to loss associated with clearer and more defined circumstances, had higher levels of family stress.

For example, ambiguous loss was clearly illustrated in a family in which the mother's second husband and her daughter's step-father had abandoned the family while they were living in Jordan. He left them in Jordan, had not attempted to reconnect with them for several years, and was not allowed to reenter Jordan. His current location and condition was unknown to this family, however, the daughter described her family feeling stressed about the possibility that her step-father could come to the United States and claim her half-brother, his son, after all this time

of having been absent. This lack of definitive knowledge about the step father's location, circumstances and intentions increased the stress level for this refugee family.

Other families described how stressful it was for them to know that they had left beloved family members behind in Iraq who continued to live in the dangerous and threatening conditions that these refugee families had left. These families were experiencing ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity with these family members because not only were they lacking knowledge about their safety or specific statuses at any given time, they also experienced the physical absence of these family members with their high psychological presence. Thus, it was difficult for these families to ascertain "who was in and who was out" of the family at any given moment. Also, for families who relied on other family members for assistance with performing certain roles, such as a family who received help with child care from the wife's mother in Iraq, the gap left by the family members who were not present with them in the United States required renegotiating responsibilities and roles. This young mother, who had a baby after she arrived in the United States, reported feeling a huge loss of her mother's presence during this event and afterwards as a result of the ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity she experienced.

I also assert that ambiguous loss can be extended to the loss of material things, places, and conditions that these refugee families had experienced as well. For example, several families described the loss of the value of years of education and social status for one or more of their members. Numerous family members in these refugee families described making substantial financial and physical sacrifices to complete their education or to continue to work in professional positions in Iraq for which they had been educated and trained. However, once in the United States, they described the loss of these efforts and opportunities, and were unclear

about the circumstances or time investment necessary to resume the paths that they were on previously to coming to live here or uncertainty about it even being possible. Thus, since the details about such losses were nebulous to them, they fit into the category of ambiguous loss, especially since the families seemed particularly stressed and concerned about these issues as would be predicted by Boss's model. Similar links existed between the concept of ambiguous loss and families' experiences with their losses of their possessions, homes, homeland, and their sense of the identities that they left behind in Iraq. These were all elements about which they were unclear with regard to their whereabouts and conditions, and if or when they would ever be able to see them or connect with them again. Describing such loss seemed to impart intense stress and sadness for some of these refugee families.

Furthermore, Boss's model of family stress (2002) viewed the stress/crisis process as occurring in an external and internal context, where the external context comprised elements of a family's environment outside of their control that they could not change and the internal context as elements that the family could influence and change. One dimension of the external context was the historical context. This portion of her model is linked to loss associated with trauma experienced by numerous families in this study. For example, a family which left Iraq 17 years ago and had been living in Jordan until they resettled in the United States, described experiencing consequences of the loss associated with trauma that occurred many years prior during a past war in Iraq. The past life in Iraq was so painful for the mother in this family that she did not want to talk about what it had been like for her family. Her daughter, however, did provide insight into this family's early loss of her father during a war that led to a series of

additional events such as her mother's remarriage, birth of another child, abandonment by her second husband and subsequent divorce, some of which were traumatic as well.

Moreover, the grandmother/mother in another family also described the painful loss of her son during a war in Iraq numerous years ago and how that loss continued to impact her and her family afterwards and even now. She described how much more protective and worried she was about her son who she was living with in the United States and her other living children since the death of her son. Consequently, these families' experiences illustrated how traumatic loss in a family due to the historical context can be transmitted from one generation to another even if the younger generation has not directly experienced it. According to Mueller-Paisner (2012), family history can tell the story of how one has become who they are and individuals form a bond with the experiences of past generations. Thus, according to Boss's (2002) model, all of these families' experiences with traumatic loss have the potential to cause stress and to influence the ability to cope, not only for the current generation, but also for the subsequent generations in these families as well.

Another aspect of the external context that Boss (2002) included in her model was the economic context. This context referred to the state of the economy in the United States and was linked to the refugee families' descriptions of their anxiety about their ability to be economically self-sufficient and financially support themselves in the United States. The nature of monetary government benefits provided to refugees at any given time, as well as the number of jobs available, and the cost of rent was partly dependent on the strength of the economy in our nation, as well as the political climate that affects these commodities. While numerous families in this study described anxiety over not having sufficient funds to meet their basic needs in the future,

other families described feeling more confident and secure about meeting these needs. All of the families in this study, except one, were receiving about the same refugee benefits, they all lived in the same geographic area, and they all had similar employment opportunities. It seemed that other factors and contexts were more influential for the families' stress levels than just the economic context.

Boss (2002) also included the developmental context as another aspect of the external context that contributed to the stress experienced by these families. This context was linked to the finding that families described more concern about their young adult children than they did about their younger children. Family members described differing experiences depending on their developmental stage. In general, younger families and families with younger children described adjusting more readily with less stress to their new environment upon resettlement than families with older family members. Not only did the younger children more readily adapt to their new culture and more readily learn the new language, they also had a clearer life path and were immersed in their new culture by automatically being enrolled in public schools. However, families with young adult children or older family members described feeling more stressed about adjusting to their new way of life in the United States, as well as having less clear of a path educationally and occupationally with regard to their future here.

Finally, Boss's (2002) model included the cultural context as an aspect of the external context which was linked to the findings regarding the acknowledgment of the importance of English language knowledge, family members not talking about the existence of religious sectarianism among Iraqi refugees in the United States, and families not reporting anti-Arab/anti-Muslim treatment in the United States. By resettling to the United States, which has a very

different cultural context than Iraq, all of the families in this study described some level of stress related to the cultural differences between where they came from and where they now live. The most influential of these experiences was described as the language difference. Families acknowledged that their ability to communicate with others using English was a great challenge and required a concerted effort for those whose English language skills were insufficient.

While Boss's model (2002) accounted for differences in terms of both culture context and religion from their culture of origin, contrary to expectations, these differences in these families' lives were not paramount to their concerns and did not stand out in their descriptions of their experiences or seem to contribute to high levels of stress for them. While they expressed concern about these differences and acknowledged their existence, in general they did not describe struggling to accommodate cultural differences with regard to appearance, beliefs, and behaviors, either from within their own Iraqi/Arab community or outside it among the American community.

Additionally, Boss (2002) included two aspects in her designation of the internal context that seemed to have a significant relevance for the degree of stress that the families in this study experienced and described. Both the psychological and philosophical contexts were clearly linked to the findings that (1) families described paradoxical experiences, (2) families experienced a transition from relief from fear to experiencing anxiety about their future, (3) time was not an influential factor in families' descriptions of resettlement processes, and (4) families expectations were not always realistic. The psychological context refers to a family's perception, meaning, appraisal, or assessment of a stressful situation, including how they feel about it, as well as what they think about it. The philosophical context refers to a family's values and beliefs

and how they influence meanings and perceptions for a family. When these two aspects of the internal context were considered, they seemed to contribute substantially to the differences in experiences that families described.

Boss's (2002) emphasis on the significance of a family's meanings or perceptions of events or stressors on their level of stress or crisis was clearly illustrated in findings from this study. For example, some families experienced a great deal of hope about their future and expected an improved quality of life in the United States, and described the presence of strong support for their family. Contrarily, other families expressed a profound sense of discouragement and a lack of hope about their prospects for a better life, as well as the scarcity of support regardless of how long they had been here. The families who described the latter experiences had the perception that their future would not be as bright as they wanted in the United States.

According to Boss (1988, 2002), these differences in how families overcame obstacles were related to whether they perceived their forced migration and resettlement positively or negatively. Those who perceived it more positively and felt that they had more of a choice about resettling in the United States seemed to describe more positive experiences and less stress than those who perceived that they had less of a choice about resettling or where it would occur. Furthermore, families whose expectations were more in line with their actual experiences experienced less stress than those whose expectations were not, partly because the latter families and family members felt less in control of their future, and described stronger disappointment and disillusionment in others from whom they expected more assistance. Whereas former families and family members felt more empowered and viewed themselves as having more mastery over their situation even in the face of managing challenges. The families and family

members who were more positive about their situations shared descriptions in which they viewed the world more optimistically than those families who were more negative about their situations and shared descriptions in which they viewed the world more pessimistically.

Sometimes individual family members had differing perceptions of their situation in contrast to the rest of their family such as a mother/wife in one family who experienced a complete lack of support from the local community or resettlement agency which led to her feeling a lack of hope for the future. However, the rest of her family described having different experiences. Consequently, as a result of the meaning and perceptions one family member attached to her resettlement experience, the entire family experienced an increased level of stress even though they did not necessarily share the same perceptions, meanings, philosophies and world views.

Links between Earlier Research and Findings

There were several clear links between findings in earlier studies presented in the literature review that examined the resettlement experience of Iraqi refugees from an individual perspective and the findings in the present study. However, it is important to note that a finding not confirmed by the results of the present study still may be a valid and important finding. With the exception of one study which used the family as the unit of analysis, the findings in the present study extended all of the earlier findings based on Iraqi refugee individual experiences by exploring them from a family perspective.

The Role of Faith and Spirituality

One clear link was related to the earlier finding that many Iraqi refugees tended to find strength and solace in their religious faith and the belief that the occurrence of traumatic events

were in God's hands and God's will (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Mollica, 2007). The findings in the present study supported this finding since numerous families, regardless of their religious beliefs, described extensively their reliance on their belief in God and His strength and protection in order for them to get through and make sense of the horrific events and trauma that they had survived.

Earlier studies also reported that survivors of violence in Arab countries tended not to feel alone, but rather shared the burden of the emotionally draining experience with each other as a community (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Elbedour et al., 1999; Sondergaard et al., 2001; Laban et al., 2004). Though the findings in the present study supported these findings according to families' descriptions of their experiences while in their homeland or even in receiving countries such as Jordan or Syria, their experiences were less consistent once they arrived in the United States.

The discrepancies in descriptions among different families and family members of support and lack of support from fellow Arabs/Iraqis while living here extends prior research findings. One explanation may be that there was tension among Iraqi/Arabs related to being affiliated with different Muslim sects which influenced a lack of support between groups. However, this phenomenon was not described by the participants, perhaps because the sectarianism may not have been an issue for these refugee families once they came to the United States since the people who possessed extremist beliefs were likely the ones perpetrating the sectarian violence in Iraq and had very negative attitudes toward the United States. Thus, they remained in Iraq. Conversely, those who chose to leave as refugees were the ones being victimized, but not conducting or condoning the violent acts. Also as a whole, the families in the

present study seemed to be highly educated and perhaps more opened-minded and tolerant of others' beliefs.

Another explanation for this lack of support among Iraqis/Arabs may be attributed to lateral violence or horizontal violence. This is a phenomenon that describes unsupportive and disrespectful treatment, usually emotional bullying or shunning, among members of a marginalized or victimized population who tend to take their resentment and mistreatment out on each other. Horizontal violence is associated with groups who have had to endure an extended history of holding the subordinate position in a situation embodied by substantial power imbalance, such as student nurses for example (Curtis, Bowen, & Reid, 2007).

Although this experience of sectarian shunning was not shared by the families in the present study, according to the primary interpreter who was intimately informed of the views among the local Iraqi community, sectarian tensions did indeed exist. It was not clear, however, precisely which families if any in the present study had such experiences. Since these finding were unexpected and puzzling, they certainly warrant additional exploration.

Another earlier finding was that Iraqi refugees tended to rely on their religious faith in order to tolerate their feeling of being "in limbo" between their homeland of Iraq, which they missed, but also feared, and the host country to which they were not necessarily committed to permanently settling (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). This earlier finding was supported by the finding in the present study related to the ambivalence and paradoxical experiences described by several families of being torn between being forced to leave their home and loved ones as a result of realizing that they needed to leave for their own preservation, yet questioning if they made the right decision by coming to live in the United States. In essence, families described

their hope and desire to feel settled in one place that they could see as their home instead of constantly feeling unsettled and uprooted.

Psychological Adaptation and Mental Health Issues

Earlier studies indicated that Iraqi refugees had more positive psychological adjustment and better outcomes when they had more optimistic attitudes about resettlement and less positive psychological adjustment when they were less committed to resettlement and had hopes of returning to Iraq (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). They also reported that religious faith and prior understanding about the context for the violence to which they had been potentially exposed served to protect against adverse psychological consequences (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Elbedour et al., 1999). Additionally, loss of social networks and separation from family contributed to psychological outcomes such as depression and PTSD (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Karam et al., 1998; Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Schreuders, & De Jong, 2004). Lack of language proficiency, economic adversity, and concern about situations in their homeland prevented recovery from such psychosocial distress (Laban et al., 2004; Sondergaard, Ekblad, & Theorell, 2001).

Findings from the present study supported the above findings. Family members who described more intense psychological distress including symptoms indicative of depression, anxiety, and PTSD also focused on their perceived economic adversity, separation from family, and concern about situations from the homeland, and tended to have more pessimistic attitudes toward resettlement. For example, one mother/wife's descriptions centered on her concern about economic adversity, separation from family and friends, and hopes for returning to Iraq. Moreover, she had no fluency in English. During her interview she demonstrated high levels of

emotional distress with her body language, tears, and expressed a desire to harm herself. Her family members also corroborated her experiences by described the stress that the entire family experienced partly due to her constant anguish.

On the other hand, family members who described less pronounced psychological distress emphasized their religious faith, language proficiency, and development of new social networks in this country, and thus had more optimistic attitudes toward resettlement. Their families described less experience with distress. For example, one father/husband described his ability to economically support his family, a fluency in English, total optimism about resettlement, and development of a new social network. During his interview he expressed enthusiasm, calmness, and questioned why he would need a counseling referral since he was fulfilling a life-long dream by coming to the United States. His wife also conveyed how helpful and supportive he was to their family perhaps due to his less pronounced stress which contributed to less intense stress for the entire family.

Economic Status and Adjustment

Earlier studies reported inconsistent findings with regard to English language fluency and employment status and income for Iraqi refugees where some reported that the two were strongly associated (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013; Waxman, 2001) and another one found no significant association (Takeda, 2000). Findings from the present study supported the conclusions that family members who had higher levels of English language knowledge did in fact describe access to improved employment opportunities.

For example, one father/husband had one of the highest commands of English of all the participants often mixed his responses between Arabic and English during the interview and was

able to respond to some of my probes or questions without the assistance of the interpreter. He described being promoted rather quickly at his place of employment to a position of increasing responsibility over other employees who had been working there longer. He described having the ability to adequately meet his families' needs financially as a result. His wife also supported her husband's perspective by focusing on other issues of resettlement that stood out to her rather than economic hardship as other families did who were struggling with employment issues and had lower levels of English language knowledge. However, since several of the families had only been in the United States for 2 or 3 months and this study was qualitative in nature, it was not possible to confirm the relationship between economic adjustment, employment status and English language knowledge in the present study. From the experiences that the families described, I suggest that these factors are not the only ones that contribute to economic adjustment for Iraqi refugees and their families and that it is a complex phenomenon with multiple contributing factors.

Furthermore, earlier research findings supported that Iraqi refugees with higher levels of education had poorer economic adjustment as a result of their reluctance to work in unskilled low paying jobs due to lack of satisfaction or embarrassment. Moreover, their college degrees and previous professional training and work experience were not accepted or recognized in the United States so they remained either unemployed or underemployed (Takeda, 2000; Waxman, 2001). The findings in the present study overwhelmingly supported these findings, as numerous family members who had completed their college degrees and were working in responsible professional positions in Iraq, described the difficulty and loss they experienced in not being able

to continue working in their fields of specialization and being offered instead jobs involving heavy manual labor.

The findings in the present study also extended the previous findings because in addition to describing feeling dissatisfied and ashamed, some family members also disclosed that that they had debilitating medical conditions that prevented them from actually being able to do the physically demanding jobs that they were being offered. Moreover, the loss of social status and education for individual family members was not only discouraging to them, but also was extremely disconcerting and contributed to high levels of stress for the entire family, particularly when young adult children were involved.

Anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim Bias

Earlier literature indicated that due to the images of violence released and circulated by the press related to the Gulf War and the reign of Saddam Hussein, in addition to the events associated with the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11th and the resultant Operation Iraqi Freedom, a pervasive anti-Arab/anti-Muslim sentiment developed among western countries, particularly in the United States (Johnson, 1992; Kaslow & Moffett, 1995; Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007; Takeda, 2000). Additionally, a previous study reported that the resultant bias against and backlash experienced by Iraqi refugees from Americans caused increased levels of emotional distress and health issues for them while living in the United States (Kira et al., 2010).

The results of the present study surprisingly contradicted these previous findings because the family members in this study did not describe any such treatment from Americans or consequent stress from it. One reason may have been that the participants did not want to

disclose incidents to me that presented Americans in a negative light for fear of insulting me or their host society. Another reason may have been because they had not been here long enough to be exposed to such treatment or perhaps that it did not exist in the specific geographical region where the families were living. Additionally, the treatment may have been so covert that they did not recognize it as such.

Even though families did not describe actually experiencing anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim biased treatment, some described having concern about being accepted as outsiders. Some also described having apprehension and anxiety, for themselves and their children, about drawing attention, being singled out, or bullied due to their unique appearance and culture, as well as their Muslim dress and practices. For example, one mother/wife, who along with her adolescent daughters wore traditional Muslim garments in public, described concern for how she and her daughters would be treated. However, after living in the United States for nearly two years, she did not describe experiencing any negative treatment or attention.

Interestingly, however, several participants did subtly acknowledge the possibility of anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim and even anti-Iraqi sentiment among Americans due to the recent upsurge of terrorist activity in Iraq from groups such as ISIS that began in 2014 and was extensively covered by the media. They did so by making statements either during or after their interviews to reassure me that Iraqis on a whole were civil, peace loving people and should not be associated with those holding extremist beliefs and carrying out the violent acts against innocent people that were being reported in the media. It was moments like these when these family members felt the need to reassure me of their lack of association with the fundamentalist

extremists and their heinous acts, that I felt particularly moved and saddened for their plight as refugees.

The discussion of links between the findings from the present study and prior research focused on resettlement experiences for Iraqi refugees from an individual perspective will now shift to links between the findings from the present study and prior research focused on resettlement experiences for refugee families in general.

Differences in Adaptation across Generations

One of the links in this arena is related to earlier studies that reported differences in adaptation among refugee and immigrant families across generations. Most of these studies suggested that difficulties and conflict between parents and children could occur when children acculturated faster than their parents which created an “acculturation gap” (Birman, 2006; Detzner, 1992; Lin, 1986; Simon, 1983; Weaver & Kim, 2008; Ying, Lee, Tsai, Lee & Tsang, 2001). The findings from the present study did not support these earlier findings since parents of school-aged children did not share any changes in their relationships with their children since resettling in the United States related to their children’s quicker adaptation to their new culture. Many of the earlier studies were conducted among families from Asian countries so their experiences and cultural contexts may have been different than those from Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq. Also, some of these families may not have been living in the United States long enough to have experienced the acculturation gap with their children. Finally, since this was a phenomenological study, parents may have had more pressing concerns and experiences that stood out to them to share rather than any conflict with their children that may have existed.

With regard to children serving as “language brokers” for their parents (e.g., Candappa & Igbiginie, 2003; Segal & Mayadas, 2005) and thus creating increased levels of stress for the families (Jones & Trickett, 2005; Trickett & Jones, 2007), the parents and adult children in the present study did not describe experiences related to such role reversal situations and stress associated with it. However, in some families I did observe several children serving in this capacity when the family convened before the interviews or reconvened at the conclusion of the interviews, so I surmised that the practice did occur in some instances. Again, it either did not create notable stress for the family members interviewed and was not an issue that stood out for them, or did not emerge in the results because the children who may have served in these roles were not interviewed. Additionally, the parents in this study may have had a higher level of English language knowledge than parents in other studies, since refugees from Iraq are generally more highly educated than the average refugee population (USDHHS, 2011).

Economic Strain and Conflict in Spousal Relationships

Another link was related to spouses in refugee families and findings from earlier studies that reported a shift in gender roles that occurred between these spouses during resettlement (Bush et al., 2010; Fox, 1991; Fox et al., 2008; Harkins, 2012). The findings in the present study supported these findings such that these couples described more shared decision making, working more cooperatively and compensating for the absence of extended family or the illness of a spouse. Some families also described a shift in gender roles in which father/husbands assisted with childcare and household duties in addition to working or seeking employment to financially support their families. For example, one mother/wife described how her husband took more responsibility for caring for their young infant since they were living in the United States,

even though he worked a full-time job, because he realized that his wife was stressed, overburdened, and feeling lonely due to the absence of their extended family in this country.

However, the results of the present study contradicted prior findings that couples experienced increased marital conflict and resentment due to the husband being unable to obtain work or the wife having to balance additional work family demands when working outside the home (Chun & Akutsu, 2003; Fox, 1991; Hitchcox, 1988; Ye-Chin, 1980). For the families in this study, none of the wives/mothers had taken employment positions out of the home so these particular issues were not applicable for these families. One reason for this contradiction may have been that the families had not been here long enough to experience economic strains that warranted these women to obtain a job. Another reason may have been that these families were embracing their traditional Iraqi culture in which the mother/wife does not work outside the home. It is interesting to note however that unmarried young adult women in these families did describe working outside the home in the United States which suggests that perhaps marriage and motherhood may impose a different set of constraints on these women such that working was no longer a socially acceptable option.

Lack of Familiarity with Host Country Educational Norms

Another link was that the findings in the present study supported earlier research in that many refugee parents expressed trust in U.S. schools for keeping their children safe and reverence for their global educational superiority (Isik-Ercan, 2012). Parents with school-aged children in this study described having confidence in the educators and school administrators for not only keeping their children safe, but also providing them with a high quality education. One family who had younger children who were not yet of school-age also described hopes and

expectations of their children receiving such treatment when they were old enough to attend school.

Contrarily, earlier studies reported that parents also experienced a disconnect from their children's school experience (Bhattacharya & Schopplerey, 2004), and a lack of acknowledgement for and sensitivity toward their unique cultural practices from educators and school administration which tended to create increased stress in their families (Chambon, 1989; Isik-Ercan, 2012). The findings in the present study contradicted these earlier findings since parents did not describe having these experiences. Again, this may have been due to the fact that these families with school aged children may have not been in the country long enough to have had these experiences, particularly since the academic school year had only just begun at the time when the families were interviewed. Additionally, parents that had been living here longer may not have described it because it did not occur for them or it did not stand out for them as paramount to their resettlement experience.

Loss, Separation, and Disruption of Family Function

The results from the present study were clearly linked to earlier findings related to the centrality of the loss for refugee families. Refugee families commonly reported feelings of loss and helplessness as a result of separation from their family and homeland (Papadopoulos, 2002; Rumbaut & Rumbaut, 1976) and this conclusion was supported by the experiences of many families in the present study. These families specifically described how hard it was for them to be away from siblings and particularly aging parents left behind in Iraq, both because of the loss of support as well as concern for their welfare. However, the earlier finding that some refugee families reported increased levels of "homesickness" and concern for family members left

behind in their homeland, the longer they had been resettled in the United States (Meredith et al., 1986) was extended by the results in the present study. Numerous families who were relatively earlier in their resettlement process and had been here less than a year described feeling that they missed their homeland and way of life left behind in Iraq, as well as describing the circumstances for family members who did not come with them to the United States. Even though they expressed concerns about their ability to provide for their more immediate needs, as would be expected for newly arrived refugees, these losses and their distress over them were very much pervasive and in the foreground for them. All of the participants in the present study were quite early on in their resettlement process, so it is not clear how their experiences of homesickness will play out across time.

Moreover, other earlier findings reported women in refugee families who came from collectivist cultures and depended on the social and emotional support of extended familial networks described feeling stressed, isolated, and the loss of support once they resettled in their new homeland since they were unaccustomed to utilizing social networks outside of their family (Fox, 1991; Fox et al. 2008, Serafica, Weng, & Kim, 2000). These findings were consistent with the findings from the present study in which women from all walks of life, but particularly wives/mothers with younger children, described their loneliness, sadness, and feeling of overwhelming responsibility since their own mothers and other family members were no longer in close proximity.

Interestingly, while describing the above loneliness and isolation due to lack of extended family, one mother/wife in the present study also described the positive feelings associated with having her own home and the privacy associated with that since living in the United States. She

described her family's arrangement living with her husband's family in Iraq as living with "a very large family". This finding extended above previous findings such that she described this paradoxical experience associated with losing her extended family. Her paradoxical experience was unique from other women in this study including another mother/wife who also had lived with her husband's family as well, but described them, in addition to her own family, as extremely supportive and their "backbone". The differences in these women's experiences may have been related to the fact that the first woman's husband was partially responsible for financially supporting his extended family and felt pressure associated with those demands, while in the latter case the woman's parents and in-laws financially supported her and her husband when they were in financial need.

Finally, the finding in the present study that there were noticeable differences in family members' descriptions of resettlement experiences associated with gender is an extension of previous findings related to Iraqi refugees and refugee family research in general. None of the earlier studies reported such findings. Overall, the women in this study, particularly the ones who were mothers, emphasized improved quality of life in terms of safety for themselves and their family, as well as the loss of their family left behind. While men also talked about these previous issues, it is important to note that men emphasized in more depth and described economic and financial issues and pressures related to their family's resettlement. By the same token, women in this study did acknowledge these financial issues as well, but they were not in the foreground for them as clearly as they were for the men. These differences may have been partly related to the gender roles and perspectives traditionally held in Iraqi culture. Traditionally, Iraqi men are expected to financially provide for their family, and women are more family focused and are

expected to carry out the responsibilities related to the day-to-day running of household and caring for the children (Nydell, 2006).

Implications for Further Research and Practice

Implications for Further Research

After considering the results and findings from this study, several areas for further exploration and research have surfaced and are deserved of examination in the future. First, a study of similar design utilizing a researcher who is either Iraqi and or is fluent in both Arabic and English should be conducted to control for the effects of utilizing an interpreter in the presence of a western researcher. Similarly, a study of similar design that utilizes a female interviewer for female participants and a male interviewer for male participants should be conducted to control for the effects of gender of the interpreter.

Second, both further qualitative and quantitative studies should be conducted to explore the differences in resettlement experiences for Iraqi refugee women and men since the present study did not specifically explore gender differences in these families. The findings in this study indicated that men and women, as well as boys and girls may have described different resettlement experiences and subscribed different meanings to such. An example of such a qualitative study would be one that included a larger number of both men and women that could capture their experiences in greater breadth in order to explore the difference in the meaning of resettlement by gender. An example of a quantitative study would be to conduct survey research with Iraqi refugee families about attitudes toward resettlement and analyze the results for differences according to gender.

Third, an additional qualitative study should be conducted that further explores the finding related to the lack of support experienced from and among fellow Iraqi/Arab refugees in the community. Participants for this additional study could include people who had identified this phenomenon in their previous interview. Additional participants may be identified using a snowball sampling technique whereby current participants would identify additional participants who have also experienced this phenomenon. By better understanding the frequency, extent and meaning of this phenomenon, resettlement workers and community members may be better positioned to assist neighbors and local Iraqi refugee communities in overcoming dissension among themselves. Thus, they may foster more supportive welcoming communities which reduce potential sectarian shunning treatment that may be continuing once they arrive in the United States.

Fourth, additional longitudinal studies that examine the resettlement experience for Iraqi refugee families over an extended length of time should be conducted to understand how the experience progresses over time for these families.

Fifth, studies that explore the resettlement experience for Iraqi refugee families who have resettled in other geographic areas of the United States besides a mid-size city in the southeast region should be conducted to describe the experience for Iraqi refugee families all over America.

Finally, a qualitative study of Iraqi refugee families that includes interviewing children between 12 and 17 years of age should be conducted to gain their perspectives, as well as the other members of their family. The lower age limit was selected because according to Gibson (2012), by 12 years of age most children are developmentally advanced enough to verbally

describe in detail the impact of external circumstances on their lives. However, potential child participants must be carefully screened prior to inclusion in research. The researcher would need to conduct preliminary interviews of the potential child participants and their parents to assess their current physical and mental health status to ensure that they were not risk for negative outcomes by participating in the study. Any children who were identified as exhibiting symptoms related to mental or physical health issues would be excluded from the study.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study can be utilized to implement improved practices for governmental and NGO agencies since it provides a richer and more in-depth picture of Iraq refugee families' experiences with resettlement in the United States from their perspectives and in their own words.

One implication might be to design a program that takes into account the trauma and loss experienced by these refugee families so that workers are more sensitive to their potentially vulnerable and fragile states upon arrival to the United States due to the extensive trauma they may have experienced. Perhaps this could involve extending financial benefits to refugees from 8 months to 18 months so they had some additional time to recover from their traumatic stress reactions and acclimate to the demands expected of them in their new homeland. However, I acknowledge that this increase in funding is not realistic at this time given the current political climate and the fact that monetary benefits for refugees are determined at the federal government level. Nevertheless, on a more local level, perhaps newly arrived refugee families could be matched with mentoring American families that could serve as cultural and social liaisons. Thus,

having close contact with U.S. families that are willing and readily available to offer support and guidance may serve to ease the stress of the refugee families' resettlement transitions.

In addition, looking across families, one of the most compelling needs that should be taken into account when considering an implication for practice would be for refugee resettlement agencies to design and implement a program that facilitates and streamlines the process for evaluating refugees' college credits, post-secondary school degrees, or prior work experience. As a result, perhaps those refugees who have invested time and money into their education in Iraq or another country and have had experience working in professional positions may receive credit for their prior efforts and more quickly and readily gain access to work in their field of study or training where they can apply their expertise.

Another implication for practice would be to provide more immediate and accessible medical care to address both physical and emotional conditions for those family members who exhibit symptoms and who identify medical issues upon their arrival at the health screenings. By doing so, those refugees who have treatable medical issues that are interfering with their ability to be more self-sufficient may more quickly be able to return to healthier states so they can better assist themselves and their families in meeting their basic needs.

Another implication for practice would be to attempt to reduce refugee families' disappointment and disillusionment as a result of having unrealistic expectations about the U.S. resettlement process by providing prior standardized accurate, timely, and valid information about the structure and process of refugee resettlement benefits and provisions. Optimally this information will be imparted to the refugees prior to arriving in the United States, however if that is not possible then immediately upon arrival to the United States, so that every refugee family

member is sufficiently informed and prepared for the challenges that lie ahead for them on their journey to a new life in their new homeland

A final implication for practice would be to consider being more culturally sensitive to the unique practices, beliefs, and behaviors of Iraqi refugee families, while taking into account that even though they are from the same country, they represent a very diverse group of people. Their various perspectives, meanings, perceptions, and philosophies about their culture, religion, and resettlement itself will affect their stress levels both on an individual and family level. Thus, each family will be unique and present with distinctive characteristics. Consequently, perhaps a “one size fits all” resettlement program will not adequately meet every families’ needs, and programs that allow for more flexibility and fluidness depending on the circumstances of the family may be more successful in assisting these families with resettlement in the United States.

The above suggestions for implications are just a few of the possible programs that can be developed or considerations that should be taken into account when implementing future practices for working with refugee families who have recently resettled. From the narratives of the families in this study, hopefully resettlement and social service staff who work directly with refugee families can directly translate the findings from this study into practices that will improve the resettlement experience not only for Iraqi refugee families, but those from other countries as well.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study

Strengths

This study has several strengths that contribute to its value, trustworthiness and transferability of the findings. First, it is unique because it is the first study that utilizes

phenomenological methodology to explore the resettlement experiences of Iraqi refugees in the United States, much less any other country in the world. Moreover, it is unique in general because it focuses on the family as the unit of analysis. Furthermore, while a couple of phenomenological studies examining experiences of individual refugees from other parts of the world have been conducted, this is the first phenomenological study to explore any aspect of life for refugee families, much less those from Iraq.

Second, this study included a diverse collection of Iraqi refugee families, including a wide range of ages, family roles, religions and denominations, ethnicities, and levels of education all of whom had experienced the resettlement phenomenon. Additionally, these families were recruited from a variety of sources so they included families with diverse resettlement experiences.

Third, for a study utilizing a qualitative design, this study included a relatively large number of participating family members and families. The diverse representation and the relatively large number of participants allowed for the exploration of the resettlement phenomenon from varied perspectives and the understanding of the meaning of the experience for a wide range for Iraqi refugee families.

Fourth, my immersion into the field prior to beginning this actual study provided me with an invaluable framework and lens with which I was better able to understand the cultural and social contexts in which these families lived. Consequently, I was better positioned to more appropriately interact with my participants which resulted in my collecting thick, rich, and meaningful data in these families' stories.

Fifth, I utilized the primary interpreter with whom I had an excellent working relationship and who had a previous relationship with the participants, so the participants clearly felt comfortable and secure in her presence. Because of this fact, I was able to gain access to participants more readily than if I had used an interpreter with whom they were unfamiliar. Additionally, I was reassured of her skills to accurately translate the participants' responses since the local refugee resettlement services and a prominent local translating service employed her for the purpose of translating sensitive and critically important information from government agencies and medical service providers to newly arrived Iraqi refugees in the community.

Sixth, the findings of the present study extended Boss's (2002) Contextual Model of Family Stress which provided a theoretical anchor point for the study by uniquely applying the concept of ambiguous loss to the loss of place, identity, and "average expectable environment" (Hartmann, 1939).

Finally, this study included newly arrived refugee families to the United States who were relatively early on in the resettlement transition. Thus, their experiences were fresh in their minds, so I was able to capture their actual resettlement experiences during the stage at which most policies and resettlement agency services are designed to address. Consequently, if these policies and services are not meeting the newly arrived refugees' needs, my findings may better position policy makers and resettlement aid workers to develop improved policies and services to more appropriately accommodate these vulnerable families' needs.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first one was that since I did not speak Arabic, I needed to rely on an interpreter to translate the participants' responses. Nevertheless, numerous

measures were taken to ensure the primary interpreter's translations were of high quality and that they accurately represented the meaning of participants' responses and experiences.

The second limitation was that some participants may have been reluctant to fully disclose or discuss sensitive topics or information due to my belonging to a culture different from theirs. An additional related limitation may have been that due to their traditionally more subservient role in Iraqi culture, some female participants may have avoided disclosing potentially disparaging information about their families' experiences or speaking in public about topics that were deemed as "taboo" for Iraqi women to discuss, such as their marriages. This limitation may also have been applicable to male participants that may have been reluctant to disclose certain topics to me and my interpreter due to the fact that we were both women. Although I deliberately chose to employ the same primary interpreter throughout the entire length of the study for the sake of maintaining consistency, the lack of having a male interpreter present for male participants could have potentially posed a limitation for some participants.

The third limitation was that some participants may have offered socially desirable responses, rather than ones that were more candid and representative of their experiences for fear of offending me, the interpreter, or being judged by either of us. Additionally, some participants may have experienced a social distance between themselves and me and/or the interpreter since I was an educated woman who was part of the primary cultural context and the interpreter was of a different ethnicity and religion than most of the participating families. Consequently, they may not have shared responses that they perceived had the potential to be negatively interpreted by me or the interpreter.

The fourth limitation was that the participating families had all resettled and resided in the same U.S. city so that the experiences of the Iraqi refugee families in this study may not be precisely transferrable to the experiences of Iraqi refugee families that resettled in other geographic locations in the United States.

The final limitation was that since children under 18 years old were not interviewed in this study, their resettlement experiences from their own perspectives were not represented in their families' experiences and narratives. This choice was made since younger children are more psychologically vulnerable and may be at a higher risk for experiencing subsequent emotional distress than adults when discussing upsetting experiences. As mentioned previously, the inclusion of children in this study would have required careful prescreening of both them and their parents with the assistance of an interpreter and was not possible due to a lack of resources.

Conclusion

When considering the essence of the meaning of resettlement experiences for the families who participated in this study, they expressed a yearning to feel permanently settled in a place that they could consider home. Yet, they were living between the world of the homeland they had left behind and their new host country in which they were attempting to grow and to develop roots. They shared hopes that they could flourish and build a new life here. While grateful at times for the opportunity to start anew, at other times they questioned whether it was worth leaving everything that was familiar to them to do so. Throughout this process of resettlement, their lives were simultaneously filled with loss, appreciation, apprehension, and hope.

Finally, the refugee families presented in this study welcomed me into their homes and entrusted me with their sometimes painful, but often moving stories of their journeys to greater

safety and a brighter future for themselves and their future generations. I am eternally grateful to them and hold all of them in the highest regard for the bravery and resilience that they have and continue to demonstrate in the face of adversity back in Iraq, as well as here in the United States. It is my hope that in presenting their stories, I have done them justice, and in doing so opened the door for improved resettlement experiences for those refugee families following in their paths.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Original Study Recruitment Flyer

Now Enrolling Iraqi Refugee Families in a Research Project

You are invited to participate in a research study on refugee family resettlement in (City, State). The primary purpose of this research study is to learn about Iraqi refugee families' experiences with resettlement in (City).

This research will be conducted by Lisa Silverman who is a PhD student at the University of _____ (State). Your participation will include an approximately 1 hour long interview in a private location of your selection. The interview is very open and directed by you so you have the opportunity to share your experiences and your story in any way that you would like. All information you share in your interview will remain confidential. No photos and no videos will be taken. The interview will be voice recorded only. No information will be disclosed about your identity or location. Even though another member(s) of your family will be interviewed, your answers will not be shared with any family members. At the conclusion of this interview you will be presented with a \$10.00 Walmart gift card for appreciation of your time.

You are eligible to participate in this study if **at least two** people in your **family**:

1. are adult men or women over 18 years old
2. came to _____ (City) at the same time and live in the same home
3. have resettled in _____ (City) as Iraqi refugees
4. have come to _____ (City) within the last 3 years
5. can speak either English or Arabic
6. are willing to be interviewed privately (but in the presence of an interpreter)
7. are willing to have the interview voice recorded

For further information or to arrange an interview, you may contact:

Lisa Silverman by email at lsilver1@vols.utk.edu or by phone at (865)-974-5316 **or**

_____ (Arabic Interpreter) by email at _____ (email address)

Appendix B. Original Telephone Script for Initial Contact

“Hello, may I please speak to _____ (name of potential participant)? _____ (person who or agency that referred the participant) let me know that you have expressed interest in participating in the Iraqi refugee family study. Is that correct? My name is Lisa Silverman and I am a student in the Child and Family Studies Department at the University of Tennessee. For my doctoral dissertation research project, I am conducting the study to learn about the experiences of Iraqi refugee families who have recently come to _____ (mid-sized southeastern U.S. city) to live. I am very interested in hearing your story and learning about you and your family’s experiences with resettlement. This study involves a private interview lasting about 1 hour long during which time you will have the opportunity to talk about your experiences of coming to live in _____ (mid-sized southeastern U.S. city) with your family. You will have the freedom to share whatever information is important to you to tell your story in any way that you choose. Even though another member(s) of your family will be interviewed, your answers will not be shared with any family members. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your choice to participate or not will not have any negative effects for you or affect your standing with _____ Resettlement Services in any way. After participating in this interview, you will be presented with a \$10.00 Walmart gift card for appreciation of your time.

Now I would like to make sure that you and your family qualifies to participate in this study so would you please let me know if you and at least one other member of your family:

1. are adult men or women over 18 years old
2. came to _____ (City) at the same time and live in the same home
3. have resettled in _____ (City) as Iraqi refugees
4. were born in Iraq or have lived there
5. came from Iraq or another bordering country directly to _____, ____ (City, State)
6. have come to _____ (City) within the last 3 years
7. can speak either English or Arabic
8. are willing to be interviewed privately (but in the presence of an interpreter)
9. are willing to have the interview voice recorded.

(If the participant does not qualify for the study): Unfortunately you do not meet all of the criteria to participate in the study, but I would like to thank you very much for your interest and time.

(If the participant qualifies for the study) : At this time I would like you to feel free to ask me any questions or express any concerns that you have about participating in this study. (After answering questions or addressing concerns): I would like to schedule the time and place for the interview. Please keep in mind that you will need about an hour and that no other family or

friends can be present in the room during the interview, so please arrange for a family member or friend to provide childcare if necessary during the time and location you choose. We can arrange to meet either in your home, an office at _____ (resettlement agency), or in a conference room at the University of Tennessee. Please let me know where you prefer and what day and time works best for you.

(After scheduling the interview): I want to thank you so much for your willingness to participate in my study. I look forward to meeting you on ____ (day and date) at ____ AM/PM (time of day) at _____ (location). Please feel free to contact me by phone at 865-974-5316 or by email at lsilver1@vols.utk.edu if you have any further questions or you need to cancel or reschedule the appointment. Have a good day.

Appendix C. Demographic Questions

At the conclusion of the interview I will collect relevant demographic information by orally asking the participant the following questions:

- 1) What is the length of time that you have resided in _____ (city)?
- 2) What is your current age?
- 3) What was your age at migration?
- 4) How many family members have resettled with you and what are their relationships and their ages at migration?
- 5) What is your current marital status?
- 6) How many children do you have and what gender are they?
- 7) What is your migration history (how long ago you left Iraq, did you come directly from Iraq to _____ (city) or through another country and if so which country)?
- 8) What is your current level of education?
- 9) What is your current level of English language knowledge (none, some, extensive)?
- 10) What is your current occupation and what was it prior to arriving in _____ (city)?
- 11) What is your current employment status and what was it prior to arriving in _____ (city)?
- 12) What is your ethnic and/or religious affiliation(s)?

Vita

Lisa Shari Silverman earned her BS in chemistry from Montclair State University in 1988 and her MA in organic chemistry from Johns Hopkins University in 1992. She worked for twenty years in the pharmaceutical industry as a medicinal research chemist in drug discovery prior to transitioning to the field of child and family studies. She earned her PhD in child and family studies at the University of Tennessee (UT) in 2015.

While at UT, Silverman was awarded the J. Wallace and Katie Dean Graduate Fellowship (2011), the Hazel Taylor Spitze Graduate Fellowship (2012, 2013, 2014), and the Phi Kappa Phi Love of Learning Scholarship (2013, 2014), as well as being inducted into the Golden Key and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies. In addition, she served as a certified sexual violence advocate, hospice volunteer, grief mentor, “big sister” mentor, leader for a girl’s outdoor group, and ESL tutor for refugees. Silverman also earned a graduate certificate in trauma, grief, and loss at UT and plans to work in an applied setting serving children and families who have experienced traumatic loss.