Women’s agency and the building of social capital, cohesion and resilience in the new Afghanistan Community in Geelong, Victoria

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The Research Institute on Social Cohesion (RIOSC) Project

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The focus of the study is on one of Victoria’s most recently established Muslim communities: the new Afghan community in Geelong. This study aims to develop a detailed understanding of how the community is developing, with a particular focus on women’s agency in the building social capital, cohesion and resilience.

The study is concerned with documenting and understanding what is working in terms of community development. Refugees fleeing conflict zones such as members of the Afghan community are perceived as being especially vulnerable to polarisation, marginalisation, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is important that their particular challenges and needs are well understood if appropriate support services are to be provided to help individuals and their community. To this end it is important to begin research on this community while it is still young and any problems are not so entrenched. The study employs a qualitative approach to personal and community narrative, and ethnography, based around semi-guided interviews and focus groups. Drawing on insights garnered from the Geelong Afghan experience, the study aims to inform local, state and federal government policy making, community agencies and civil society on ways to support women in the building of community social capital and cohesion in similar communities of Muslim refugees.

A total of 115 women and 35 Afghan men were interviewed in Geelong. The interviewees responded very positively to the research team and appeared happy to be able to share their life stories, fears and aspirations. Three quarters of those interviewed were ethnic Hazara and the vast majority (79 per cent) had come directly to Australia from Afghanistan, with much smaller groups coming to Australia from Iran, Pakistan and Iraq (16, 4 and 1 per cent respectively). Three age cohorts were interviewed: those aged 18-25, those aged 25-40 and those over 40. The numbers interviewed in each age cohort were roughly equal.

The greatest challenges identified by respondents related to accessing education and employment and one of the main barriers cited was learning English. The older women (over 40) were generally illiterate and struggled with learning English. Many were widowed single mothers who had arrived on the Women at Risk visa program. Older men appeared to fare better in learning English and gaining employment than women their age. This is likely not only because of cultural factors influencing confidence but also the fact that the men were much more likely to be literate and they did not experience as many practical difficulties with child care.

An unexpected, but very significant, finding was that, completely unsolicited, many of the respondents, and most of the women, reported struggling with depression, stress, and the effects of substantial trauma experience in Afghanistan. Almost none of these women were receiving specialist counselling help, in part because of language barriers.

No minors were interviewed but from interviews with young adults still at school, or having recently graduated it appeared that, as might be expected, those who had previously studied, or were currently studying, were not only much more comfortable using English but were doing better on all fronts than their older family members. It is very significant that amongst the under-25 cohort girls and young women generally appeared to be doing much better than boys and young men. Male teenagers, in particular, were the group most likely to be suffering from adverse peer-pressure, troubles at school and delinquent behaviour. This represented a significant concern for their mothers, most of whom were widows, who struggled to inspire, guide and discipline their teenage sons. Although there was no suggestion that radicalisation is currently perceived to be a problem within the Geelong Afghan community there are reasons to be concerned that it could emerge in the future.
For much of the past four decades Afghanistan has been subject to a cycle of conflict that, at any point in time, has seen large sections of the nation of 30 million people caught up in regional and nationwide civil war and violence.

Much of this conflict has been framed in religious term, accentuating misogyny, and the result is that women have suffered disproportionately, particularly amongst the four-fifths (78 per cent) of the population that live in small towns and villages outside the major cities. The ancient patriarchal character of conservative traditional culture in Afghanistan has been acerbated by reactionary cultural innovations justified in the name of religion (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA, 2010).

The misogynistic practices of the Taliban – a relatively recent arrival in Afghan society – are but one of many elements contributing to the oppression of women. The trauma that has resulted from the conflict and violence that has impacted on virtually every family in Afghanistan is compounded by extensive poverty and, for many people, sudden reversals in fortune. The conflict has driven more than ten percent of the population into seeking asylum as refugees outside the country, with the majority taking immediate refuge as marginal peoples in Iran and Pakistan. A similar number have been forced to leave traditional farming communities and become internally-displaced people.

Hundreds of thousands of women have been widowed and many young girls forced into marriages that see them serving with low-status and meagre rights in large extended families. Practices such as the exchange of girls to avoid dowry costs (badal) see many girls forced into marriages with much older men (Aziz, 2012; Smith, 2009a).
a society in which shame and honour are of central importance reports suggest that many women suffer not only at the hands of their husbands but also their mother-in-laws and other senior members of the household (HealthNet TPO, 2011). Abuse, domestic violence (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2010), and not uncommonly, murder, in the name of (male) honour have become all-too-familiar elements in contemporary Afghan society especially in rural areas.

Against a backdrop of conflict, precarity and grinding poverty, rates of drug abuse (primarily opium and hashish, which are produced in abundance in Afghanistan) are amongst some of the worst in the world. Given these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that many studies report high levels of anxiety and depression across the population of Afghanistan (Ventevogel et al, 2012), and particularly amongst women (Rostami-Povey, 2003, 2004).

Although migration has many benefits, refugees and immigrants are among the vulnerable groups in their host countries. According to a report by World Health Organisation (WHO), immigrants are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and various forms of discrimination with significant impact on their physical and mental health (Hosseini-Divkolaye & Burkle, 2017). The full extent and nature of these mental health issues remain unclear, but at the very least it is clear that very high levels of distress exist (Bolton & Betancourt, 2004; Miller et al., 2006, 2008). High levels of anxiety and depression symptoms are also reported amongst children and many have suffered serious exposure to traumatic events (Catani, Schauer & Neuner, 2008; Panter-Brick et al., 2011). Many women and children endure family violence, endemic poverty and poor access to education and health services, including reproductive health services, factors recognised as contributing to poor mental health (WHO, 2009a; 2009b).

A large number of Afghan women who take refuge to other countries as refugees experience great challenges in engaging in educational and career opportunities (Aziz, 1999; Jamal, 2008). Most continued to be strongly influenced by their past history of conflict and patriarchal family structures (Aziz, 1999; Beiser & Hou, 2000; Jamal, 2008; Omidian, 1992; Rostami-Povey, 2007). Around fifty percent of men and seventy five percent of women are illiterate, compounding problems by effectively limiting access to services and awareness of basic rights, and many of the Afghan refugees are suffering from prevalent mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Pour et al, 2014).

Language and literacy barriers represent important challenges to education and employment for all refugees in Australia but especially for Afghan women. Levels of unemployment are higher amongst the Afghan female population due to lower literacy, isolation and lack of employment skills (Rintoul, 2009).
2. CONCEPTUAL AND POLICY BACKGROUND

2.1 Project Rationale
Being mindful of the circumstances driving Afghans to seek asylum abroad as refugees, and the ways in which those circumstances continue to impact upon refugee communities, this RIOSC research project chose to focus on the challenges facing Afghan women in Victoria. The Afghan community in Geelong was chosen as a focus of this study, not only because it has been only recently established but also because it is characterised by the large proportion of families led by widowed mothers who arrived under the Women at Risk special visa subclass 204 program (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2017).

The study aims to develop a detailed understanding of women’s agency in the building of social capital, cohesion and resilience in the fledgling Afghan community established in Geelong since 2011. We used a qualitative approach to personal and community narrative, and ethnography, based around semi-guided interviews and focus groups with our Afghan participants in Geelong in examining the social capital and the building of community with a particular focus on women’s agency. The concept of agency – taking charge of personal and community activities to drive change – is part of a rich multidimensional concept that underpins all aspects of social cohesion as defined by the Mapping Social Cohesion 2016 report (Markus, 2016). Our study aims to develop a richer understanding of the Afghan community that will be of interest not only to scholars but will also inform policy formulation and implementation at local, state and federal government level, as well as community agencies and civil society groups on ways to support Afghan women in the building of community social capital and cohesion.

Although the focus of the study is Afghan women in Geelong, it was neither sensible nor practicable to interview women alone. Rather, even where the bulk (around three quarters in this case) of the respondents are women, it is still important to talk to men of all ages in the community in order to better understand the circumstances facing the women, whether as mothers, young adults or children.

Early in the research it became clear that there is significant interaction between the Afghan community in Geelong and the Afghan community in Dandenong. This is not surprising considering that the Dandenong community has been much longer established and very much larger and, consequently, better-resourced than the community in Geelong. Moreover, given the fact that the physical distance between the two communities (about 90 minutes by car and a little longer by train) is not too great the barriers to interaction are relatively low. During the first round of interviews in Geelong a number of the people who presented at the community centre revealed that they were regular visitors to Geelong but were resident in Dandenong. At the same time, most of the Dari-speaking research team members were personally connected to the greater-Dandenong area and consequently were familiar with the development of that community and related services. As a result, comparisons between the two communities developed naturally and proved very helpful in understanding the Geelong community. This led to the research team deciding to conduct a limited number of interviews with service providers and Afghan community leaders in Dandenong as a way to better understanding conditions and dynamic in Geelong.

The study is concerned with documenting and understanding ‘what is working’ in terms of community development. As social science and community development developed through the course of the Twentieth Century ‘social capital’ emerged as a key concept in explaining community dynamics and individual agency. Writing at the beginning of the century in the ground-breaking The Rural School Community Center (Hanifan, 1916) describes the concept of social capital as ‘those tangible substances (that) count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families. If he comes into contact with his neighbour, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community’ (Hanifan 1916, p. 130).

In the closing decades of the century, social capital gained renewed interest through the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1983), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1995), most notably in his Bowling alone: The collapse and the revival of American community. Putnam (1993, p. 2) defines social capital as ‘a set of horizontal associations among people who have an effect on the productivity of the community or features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’. Putnam’s definition sets the context (individuals, community or organisation), aspects (networks, norms and trust), processes (facilitating coordination and cooperation) and outcome (mutual benefit) of social capital.

Woolcock (2001) explains that, on a practical level, social capital can be categorised into three primary types: bonding — having to do with relations within groups; generally between family, close friends and neighbours; bridging — being concerned with relations between groups: including between distant friends, associates and colleagues; and linking — having to do with relations between sympathetic individuals in positions of power.

This study has a particular focus on the contribution of women to the development of bonding, bridging and linking of social capital; people working together for common purpose in groups and networks (Fukuyama, 1995; Bourdieu, 1985; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), community building and culture of trust (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Putnam, 1995), building relationships, trust and norms of reciprocity (Woolcock, 1998; Pennar, 1997) and the positive effect of women’s agency where a woman can have a sense or feeling to be
autonomous (Mahoney, 1994; Richie, 1996). These components are used in this research to explore the role of a detailed understanding of women’s agency (Caprioli & Douglass, 2008; Evans & Nambiar, 2013; Hampton, 2004) in the building of social capital, cohesion and resilience (Peucker, 2017) in the fledgling Muslim Afghan community in Geelong. Muslim communities such as this are perceived as being at risk of polarisation, marginalisation, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Mierlo, 2012; Miller et al, 2006; Miller et al, 2008). It is commonly assumed that the stresses of recent migration and high levels of psychological and socio-political distress (Panter-Brick et al, 2008) in the country of origin compound this vulnerability. At the same time, it is widely agreed that it is important to address this vulnerability by building social cohesion (Markus, 2016; Peucker, 2017) and resilience (Plough et al, 2013; World Health Organisation, 2009a).

This RIOSC project report the analysis engages with all three RIOSC research priority areas but will take a particular line of engagement with each them, as follows:

2.2 Research Priority 1: Social Cohesion and Diversity
Rather than simply seeking to measure social cohesion and analyse how it is constituted, this research project embraces the opportunities presented in studying a new community to examine community formation and the development of intra-community and inter-community relations and the accumulation and development of bonding, linking and bridging social capital. This focus is premised on the understanding that social cohesion is directly related to social capital. In other words, the quality and character of a community is bound up with the quantity and nature of relationships across the community (bonding social capital) and between community members and members of other communities that they interact with (bridging social capital).

Together, these relationships contribute to both the strength, or cohesion of the community, and its resilience. Studying their formation and development specifically addresses the subsidiary point of protective factors that build resilience to racist and religious exclusivist views.

2.3 Research Priority 2: Community Polarisation, Marginalisation and Violent Extremism
The primary focus of this study is on community building and the production and development of social capital, rather than directly addressing violent extremism. At this point it is not evident how, or to what extent, this new community has been troubled by violent extremism. But as a community of refugees coming out of one of the world’s major conflict zones and facing many challenges and stresses in settling in Australia, with particular burdens upon the youth it is reasonable to assume that members of this community are potentially vulnerable to alienation and radicalisation. By focussing holistically on understanding the dynamics of community formation and the agency of women in developing social capital, this study directly addresses the subsidiary point that develops a multi-disciplinary program approaches that incorporate health, educational and other expertise to holistically tackle issues related to violent extremism.

2.4 Research Priority 3: Project Innovation and Evaluation methodologies
By focusing on the agency of women in the precipitating, facilitating and nurturing of social capital, and by implication social cohesion and social resilience this study is also seeking to directly address the following subsidiary point that develop innovative methodologies and theories for assessing the strength and impact of individual and cross-program initiatives to community resilience, social cohesion and the prevention of violent extremism.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach combining ethnography with personal and community narrative. This approach to documenting and assessing community development and the growth of social capital, together with the specific focus on the contributions made by women promises to provide unique insights in the development of community resilience and social cohesion.
This is a qualitative case study undertaken in Geelong Afghan community. Qualitative research is conducted to explore an issue that requires a complex and detailed understanding (Creswell 2013, pp. 47-8). Moreover, case study research is most likely to be appropriate for ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Yin 2014, p. 29). This means that the case study method is well-suited to gaining insights into emerging practices integrated reporting and potentially ensuing integrated thinking practices within the real-life context. According to Creswell (1994), the nature of the problem partially determines why a researcher uses a qualitative or quantitative approach for the design of a research case study. Qualitative case study answers questions about what is happening in a particular situation and gives detail descriptions of the impression. It also facilitates detail descriptions of what is happening in a conversation, the meaning of the message, feelings, and effects (Bouma & Ling, 2004).

In qualitative research, what people say is captured and interpreted to understand the participants’ perspective of a particular event or phenomenon (Burns, 2000). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), and Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the qualitative approach is appropriate to answer questions about the nature of a phenomenon with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomenon from the participant’s perspective.

This research project is conducted within a framework of assumptions that determine what questions are legitimate, and how answers may be obtained. In this research, the researcher also aims to illustrate the value of research that is not consistent with the assumptions. These assumptions are similar to approaches such as appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987).

People shape their own social world within themselves. Each person’s social world is also shaped by his or her interactions with others. Meanings are continually constructed and reconstructed both within the individual, and through social interactions. Shared meanings are created through these social interactions, and these shared meanings constitute social reality (Berger & Luckman 1971). The researcher is part of a social relationship through which knowledge and understanding are constructed. However, life is lived based on the assumption of shared meanings (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). As Kapferer (1986, p. 189) puts it: ‘paradoxically, your experience is made mine; I experience my experience of you’. Although, a researcher’s voice must always be distinct from the participant’s, the researcher’s voice can be grounded in the research participants’ experiences and reflect a shared understanding. Similarly, the researcher’s understanding of the individual’s social world is preconceived, and yet it is also socially constructed through communication with the participants and others during the period of research activity (Burgess-Limerick 1998).

3.1 Selection of the case organisation:
The researchers have selected the Geelong Afghanistan community in Geelong. This was done with the assistance of Diversitat.

3.2 Research fieldwork
Field work for the project commenced in mid-June with two initial scoping visits to Geelong, preceded by background research in Dandenong. The research team met with community engagement team workers at the City of Greater Dandenong, and others working with the Afghan community, to learn from them about the experience of Afghan settlement in Dandenong. The research team then visited Geelong to meet with Afghan community leaders and with staff at Diversitat at their Norlane centre (the Afghan community is mostly settled in and around Norlane and Corio in the north of Geelong). This initial visit was used to set up a longer visit and formal interviews in July 2017.

The research team conducted a three-day research visit and started their initial round of formal interviews. The research team was comprised of six researchers and four research assistants who were Afghan-born. The response rate from Geelong Afghan community participants was remarkably high during the initial 3-day interviews. The research team interviewed 150 Geelong Afghan participants for the duration of 20-90 minutes.

Table 1: Afghan participants in Geelong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age split by age categories</th>
<th>Afghan Women interviewed in Geelong</th>
<th>Afghan Men interviewed in Geelong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Afghan participants in Geelong

Figure 1: Female participants by age range
Figure 2: Male participants by age range

Figure 3: Geelong Afghan female participants by marital status

Figure 4: Geelong Afghan female participants by number of children
Over the three days of interviews in July, the researchers gained insights into a number of significant issues, including some that they had not anticipated, such as some unanticipated barriers to English language acquisition and thus capacity building faced by the new arrivals (as most of the women are illiterate and struggle to make sense of material taught in the English classes). The researchers discovered that many of the participants voiced concerns about finding work and career progression. It became clear that bonding and bridging social capital formation amongst younger and older Afghans have differed significantly. While those that were older tended to be more Afghan-community oriented. It was apparent that many of the youth had established intensive trusting networks with people and institutions outside of their Afghan community.

Recognising the importance of these issues, the researchers refined and augmented the questionnaires to be used for the next stage of interviews in order to build upon insights gained and better address issues. This led to the decision to incorporate material relating to cultural linguistics (that is to say, the ways in which language shapes perception as well as expression, and so influences cultural dynamics) and career development.

The research team received multiple invitations to extend the study to the Afghan community in Dandenong (as alluded to above, it became clear that the Afghan communities in Geelong and Dandenong are substantially interlinked and consequently we decided that instead of studying the community in Geelong in isolation, it would be better to include some comparative material on Dandenong where there is a more established Afghan community.

With this in mind, in October, we submitted a modification to our ethics application to broaden the geographical scope of communities engaged to include other Victorian Afghan communities; with a view to future interviews in Dandenong, and possibly in other locations such as Shepparton.
4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Origins, culture and confidence
As a group, the Afghan refugees who had previously lived in Iran were more confident and open to seizing learning opportunities in Australia than were those who had lived in Pakistan prior to coming to Australia. This was particularly significant amongst the women. Afghans living in Iran face many forms of direct and indirect discrimination but they lived amongst the general population rather than in refugee enclaves, as was the case in Pakistan. Afghan women in Iran, living amongst Iranian women, were exposed to a society and culture in which women showed more direct agency and identity (Rostami-Povey, 2007) in their everyday life and benefited from greater openness than Afghan women in Pakistan or Afghanistan.

Amongst the 112 Afghan women interviewed in Geelong approximately 79 per cent came directly from Afghanistan, 16 per cent came from Iran, 4 per cent came from Pakistan and 1 per cent (one individual) came from Iraq. For comparison purposes, 25 Afghan women from Dandenong were interviewed in October. Out of these 25 women 15 had lived in Iran before coming to Australia. Most of the 150 Afghan men and women interviewed in Geelong were ethnic Hazara. (For the purposes of the initial interviews respondents were not asked about their ethnicity but the survey did have a question about languages spoken at home. Only 15 of the women reported speaking Hazaragi at home but given the prevalence of Dari in the Afghan community in general it would appear that most of the Hazara families in Geelong communicated in Dari and English. It is important to note that as Hazaragi is an eastern dialect of Farsi/Dari but most speakers are also comfortable communicating in standard Dari).

4.2 Sense of belonging, social space, social capital and habitus
The concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘capital’ as being central to understanding Bourdieu’s theory of ‘capital’ (Bourdieu, 1991). The concept of ‘habitus’ is discussed first, followed by an explanation of the concept of ‘capital’ from Bourdieu’s point of view. It is an explanation of how the concept is employed in discussing identity negotiation in immigrant women’s life history narratives. The concept of habitus has been understood variously in different fields. Grenfel (2008, p.50) explains that habitus brings together the relationship between the social and the individual, and how it pertains to “how the ‘outer’ social and ‘inner’ self-help to shape each other”. Bourdieu (1991) described habitus as the property of social agents. Examples of these agents are individuals’ educational background, economic status, family background and nationality. Habitus is an individual’s way where one carries within oneself such as the individual’s previous history and family background shapes their present and future social practices.

According to Bourdieu (1984), what makes a distinction among individuals is their tastes, their cultural background, and how they represent themselves. These factors represent their hierarchy in society and the extent to which individuals fit in their social environments. Bourdieu states that, “differences in cultural capital mark the differences between social classes” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 69). Bourdieu emphasises the arbitrariness of the signs of cultural capital and ‘legitimate culture’.

In exploring the identities of the Geelong Afghan refugees, the concept of capital provided a valuable analytic tool to understand the impact of these resources on their language learning experiences and the way their habitus operates in a second language context as their cultural and social resources enable them “to reflexively resist and/or act back on the social forces impinging on them” (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 145).

In expressing their sense of belonging, the responses varied in participants’ background, age group, and their language abilities. Younger participants tend have an easier acceptance of Australia as their new home, while older participants are still connected to their past, especially back to Afghanistan or where their extended families are located. This observation was also noticeable in their circle and number of friends. The number of friends that respondents reported having varied greatly both in number and in the cultural background of these friends. The younger Afghan participants tended to have friends from other ethnic backgrounds. Those who expressed that they have some/little number of friends tend to have most of those friends from similar cultural backgrounds (Turkish, Pakistani, and Afghan). The larger the circles of friends that people reported having the more diverse they become. One young Afghan woman who was studying at the college said:

“When I mix with different people at school, they are from different countries. I get along well with them. We share similar challenges...English. When I came, I have no English. Now slowly, slowly.”

The women interviewed expressed feeling grateful ‘to be in a safe country like Australia’, but none of them ‘felt at home’. Many of the older Afghan women had no other family in Australia, and with their children attending school, many reported sleeping during the day when the house was empty to ward-off their loneliness:

“An ‘infidel country’ is now my home”, one older Afghan woman jokingly stated to cover up the sense of loneliness she felt.

“My family and I have multiple and ongoing barriers in settling and might continue for many years to come. The problems include having a secure and long-term housing, finding employment and loneliness.”

“Many women and me find it hard to balance our children between Afghan and Australian culture and learning English.”
“Where am I?” she continued and cried as she spoke about her fear of loneliness and of her sons leaving her once they get married. “If only I had a daughter, a sister, a cousin, any family member, if only I had someone to pour my heart out to. It is very lonely.”

“I face many barriers in English language learning, grief and loss of family members at my country. I also experienced of past trauma and culture shock.”

Although, most of the young Afghan women happily spoke about the kindness they experienced daily from the local communities, schools and colleges, they reported that they are not yet really feeling at home in Australia. They feel as long as they make effort to get to know different people from different background, they can get connected and have a sense of belonging in the community. Many of them expressed the belief that the main thing for them to feel more at home, is to learn English, and be able to communicate with everyone around them. Meanwhile, some participants mentioned their attempts to organize events, go for walk, barbequing by the beach and inviting each other to their houses.

A recurring problem that mothers in the community reported facing was that of a culture clash that their children faced between the Afghan culture at home and the Australian culture at their schools and all around them. It causes a lot of tension at home and mothers feel that they were ‘losing their children to the Australian culture’. The absence of a father-figure and the erosion of the father’s authority in the family due to several reasons, makes it difficult for mothers to deal with their children and specially to deal with their teenage sons.

When asked: “Are there repeated instances where there is a sense of being Australian dictated by being a citizen?”

For one participant, this was driven by their other Afghan friends said:

“No, I think, yea, I think I’m not belong now maybe next year... I can’t say I’m Australian now.”

Many of the youth interviewed, however, said that they did feel a sense of belonging: “I’m gonna live here for the rest of my life. My kids are gonna live here, my grandkids gonna. Everyone. After me, they’re gonna live here. So, this is my home, this is my new home...”

“Yea... Very much. Coz when I’m in this country, living in this country, so obviously I am part of this community and I am a part of this country so I have to be involved with every single thing.”

Others expressed their sense of belonging to the immediate community. And that those within the Hazara community can rely on each other to help.

Young Afghan women reported experiencing a mixed sense of belonging experienced. One young woman, a mother of two children, said that she ‘will never call this place [Australia] home’. She reported that, after she left her family in Iran, she had never felt happy again, but she is trying to be supportive of her family here and want to raise educated children, since she never got the chance to finish her education.

Some of the women said having a “community” is good because they get to know other Afghans, but they are very selective in choosing their friends. The issue of acceptance in the Afghan community was clearly a very important issue. One woman, an exception to the rule, said that she refused to conform to the norms of Afghans - such as the expectation that she would wear a Hijab - and hence becoming isolated from the rest of the community. She thinks that, living amongst Afghans has not been an easy thing for her, and hence she has decided to separate herself from the rest of the community. In several cases, there was a mention of “feeling safe” here and thus they are happy with their new home, Australia.

In responding to questions about perceptions about Australians’ thoughts of Afghans, many of the Afghan participants expressed feeling ‘not-so-positive’ or expressed the presence of ‘some/little’ racism. Nevertheless, they mainly reported feeling that most local people are good towards Afghan community, and that there is not much racism in Australia. A few middle-aged Afghan women, however, reported regular verbal Islamophobic attacks, especially because of their headscarves.

One noted that despite the endeavour to show the best side of one’s character to others, occasionally someone may still say something like ‘get out of the country’. These seem to point towards the assumption that the topic is about racism or negative views. Interestingly, one participant observed that there were less problems in a smaller city like Geelong, than living in a bigger city like Melbourne.

In doing so, they still expressed the view that:

“Even if you’re in Australia for 20 years, you’re gonna be Afghan no matter what, your background is always gonna be Afghan.”

Showing a strong sense of love and attachment to Afghanistan, whilst displaying strong attitudes of respect, love, and being thankful towards Australia. This could speak to a duality/multiplicity of identity that some migrants could experience.

“This country gives you what you can’t get in Afghanistan you know, it gives you freedom, it gives you... helps you get Centrelink, you get... In Afghanistan [inaudible] the amount of support you can’t get in Afghanistan. No way. Never in your life you’ll get as much support here - much more than you get in Afghanistan.”
Another participant noted a positive experience when starting high school:

"When we came here we started year 7. All new kids. Even though we didn't speak one word of English, they help us a lot. Even though they couldn't speak our language. But they still try to help."

In general, the sense of community solidarity expressed by the Afghan women and men in Geelong was often threatened by a degree of mistrust and suspicion towards other members of the community. Whilst conducting the interviews, it was evident that the women would continuously look around before answering a question. They appeared to be on guard and watching what they were saying to ensure that nobody else was listening.

One young Afghan woman said that she felt very hopeful about her future and explained how important education is for shaping what she wants to become as an IT technician. Another young girl gave an interesting response saying that she did not like having to live in the Afghan community in Geelong, feeling that she is being observed and watched all the time. She thought that, being away from the community would open up doors for her social interactions and personal freedom.

In another case, a young female participant mentioned that she is afraid of being judged by other Afghans in the community. She said, "If I want to meet my friends, I have to make sure we meet in public, or in big gatherings, especially with male friends, coz people may talk about me."

Many younger interviewees reported belonging to a sporting club. One interviewee reported changing sporting clubs for the sole purpose of meeting more friends:

"I've been joining like a lot of soccer clubs. Like every year I change my soccer clubs because I look forward to meet new people. Every year I'm changing my club so I get to know new people and stuff from new clubs."

Most of the women and families who first arrived in Geelong, reported that they did not have the support they expected when they arrived - such as someone to show them around and help familiarise them with their surroundings. This caused an overwhelming feeling of fear and loneliness for the families newly settling into Geelong, most of whom spoke no, or little, English.

The huge number of displaced populations has turned migrant health into a priority global health priority. Although international migration may have some benefits, immigrants are usually among the most vulnerable groups in destination countries. Migrants are commonly subjected to multiple discriminations, violence or exploitation which may have considerable impact on their mental and physical health. According to a report of World Health Organization (WHO), in some countries migrants find themselves completely excluded from routine health services (Hosseini-Divkolaye & Burkle, 2017).

4.3 Experience of Discrimination

4.3.1 Aspects of Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as rejection or exclusion of certain individuals or groups of people from some opportunities on the basis of their racial characteristics, class or category (Clark, et al., 1999). There are studies by various authors (Barakat & Waradel, 2000; Khanlou et al., 2008; Windle, 2008) that have looked at the impact of discrimination on different ethnic and religious groups living in different social contexts, and the role of the social environment in adaptive responses of different groups of immigrants. There are studies that also examine the impact of discrimination on the behaviour of different groups of immigrants from different backgrounds in a new social context (Berry et al., 2006; Gholizadehet al., 2009; Ghorashi, 2003; Hashemi, 2006; Rippy & Newman, 2006; Tehranian, 2006; Vanderplaat, 2007).

The majority of the studies that have approached discrimination have examined the role of discrimination against different ethnic, religious, nationality groups and different groups of immigrants from different backgrounds in a new social context (Berry et al., 2006; Gholizadehet al., 2009; Ghorashi, 2003; Hashemi, 2006; Rippy & Newman, 2006; Tehranian, 2006; Vanderplaat, 2007).

The perception of discrimination impacts on the ways individuals choose to enter into contact with the outside world. Previous studies have come up with contrasting results in regards to the role of the perception of discrimination on individuals (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Verkuyten 2002; Yoo & Lee 2005).

Discrimination has been viewed as not only leading to protective psychological outcomes but also having negative social and psychological outcomes that could result in lowered self-esteem, elevated stress, depression, drug abuse and violence (Dubois et al., 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

4.3.2 Facing criticism from the Afghan community

Some Afghans are not only subjected to discrimination, but also being judged by their own community members. A young woman expressed that because of her choice of dressing, some women tend to look at her differently, and in one incident, she was physically attacked. Based on our observations it is clear that “fitting in” is a complicated process.

4.3.3 Facing discrimination from the non-Afghan community

In another incident, a woman mentioned that:

"Every time I have a guest over, my neighbour comes and shouts at me to "go back to where you come from". But he is..."
an addict, so he could be not in a right mind.”

Some of the Afghan women perceived being subject social discrimination:

“They did not include me in their conversations and look at me like I do not belong here.”

In terms of direct discrimination and perceived threats, this topic drew some very mixed responses. Some expressed complete denial of any experience with discrimination. Others noted that they had had encounters with discrimination.

In Geelong, sometimes when they go shopping in the Geelong shopping mall, they explained, some of the older Afghan women experienced discrimination where people said things to them like: “go back to your country, you are a terrorist”. This also happens when they go to the nearby park. They noted that: “they’ don’t say anything to the men.” Perhaps suggesting the visible nature of Islam in a community where women dress in a distinctive style can attract Islamophobia. This does not happen all the time, they reported, but it certainly occurs sometimes and especially after an Islamist extremist terrorist attack takes place in a Western country.

All in all, however, relatively few of Afghan community members that the researchers spoke to in Geelong, expressed facing any form of significant discrimination from Australians, but many spoke of continuously receiving judgement from women within the Afghan community. Most of the women expressed how they refrain from doing activities or wearing certain clothes due to the judgement they have received from the Afghan community in Geelong.

When asked why she does not go for walks to exercise, one of the women replied with:

“If I do that the Afghan community will talk about me.”

One young Afghan man said that he had experienced racism whilst playing soccer:

“People used to call us during the game. They swear at you or they say ‘go back to your own country’ and stuff, you just get over it, like, yeah part of it, just get used to it or something. And then sometimes that’s there and my mates there we’ll fight and stuff against it”.

Another young Afghan youth participant spoke about her mother experiencing discrimination:

“I think it happened once with my mum. Coz my mum was wearing a scarf. And when she was going Corio Shopping Centre, so someone did [inaudible] my mum…. They just swearing my mum. And then she was, they were like, telling my mum ‘your scarf is poo you have to take it off’ something like this, they talk to my mum.”

When the participants were asked questions about religion, language, unemployment, poverty and future of their children, their responses elicited more responses that could be easily classified under discrimination/prejudice that perceived religious discrimination which has a positive association with anxiety and subclinical paranoia (Rippy & Newman, 2006). The women participants mentioned that, at times, they found ethnic stereotyping at their workplace and place of study to be very challenging to the point that it represented a major hindrance (Hashemi, 2006). Many of the women refugees interviewed mentioned that racial discrimination as their “greatest threat” (Akhavan et al., 2007, p. 349) to their health. One spoke of finding it particularly hard after ‘the terrorist attack in Sydney’ [presumably the Lindt Café siege, the participant was living in Western Australia at that time:

“...before this happened, all the Aussie people were very good with me. When I go somewhere they are shaking hand and good smile...When this happened and when we go shopping, by walk, when go to shopping by walk, and go to the park they are saying very bad word to us. Because you are Muslim, you are terrorist go back to your country...”

After attacks, they started experiencing discrimination and Islamophobia as their headscarf is visible. It is evident that stress, depression, paranoia and low self-esteem are factors that leave an unfavourable impact on the language learning process of individual refugees and the way they manage their interaction with their social context. This clearly impacts and alters the way they choose to make contact with the wider Australian community and their physical and psychological well-being (Akhavan et al., 2007). The perceptions of discrimination experienced by Afghan refugees contributes to their levels of stress to the point where they have a negative impact on language learning and their adaptation to a new community. The experience of discrimination is different in different individuals according to their cultural and psychological backgrounds but there is reason to believe that is particularly difficult for those coming from a patriarchal society having experienced traumatic events prior to them fleeing their country (Akhavan et al., 2007; Hashemi, 2006; Khanlou et al. 2008).

4.4 Health-Related Factors

Experiences of trauma, a high incidence of distress, gendered family roles and racialised discriminatory practices are significant in the lives of Afghan immigrant women. Rahmani (1992) and Lipson et al. (1995) explore the role of gender in the psychological adjustment of Afghan immigrants. They suggest that a significantly higher proportion of Afghan refugee women tend to suffer more from psychological disorders compared to Afghan men. Lipson et al. suggest that difficulties in communicating in English, combined with economic and occupational problems added to cultural conflicts, as are the main reasons for the various psychological problems encountered
by Afghan women participating in their studies. It was certainly significant in our study that, completely unprompted, the majority of Afghan women reported suffering from stress-related depression, somatic complaints and mental health problems.

Our initial findings include the observation that one on the main barriers to Afghan women exercising agency and building social capital is that many of the Afghan women in Geelong suffer from a general lack of confidence, for some this is severe and for many is also accompanied by significant levels of depression and stress associated with past trauma (Miller et al, 2008; Panter-Brick et al, 2011; World Health Organisation, 2009a).

The research team’s approach to the semi-structured interviews was to begin by building rapport and focusing on being active listeners, with the aim of facilitating the interviewees in telling their own stories. As is typically the case with ethnographic work in general, when presented with genuine interest and an attentive ear, most interviewees were keen to talk about themselves.

Whilst no attempt was made to raise the topic of stress and mental health most respondents were quick to volunteer insights into their personal struggles and the things that concerned them most. The majority reported taking anti-depressants and many would appear to be affected by varying degrees of serious stress, and in some cases, this may include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ventevogel et al, 2012), which is not surprising given their experiences either living in Afghanistan or in refugee communities in Pakistan and Iran. When these topics came up in conversation the interviewers listened with interest without seeking to steer the discussion or push the interviewees in any particular direction.

Depression was a prevalent theme that presented itself in almost every one of these women’s interviews and was described as preventing them from engaging in many other areas in their lives. Their depression affected their abilities to sit in a classroom and learn English, and thus affecting the likelihood of finding a job. The reasons for their depression includes loneliness, feeling homesick, concern for family back in Afghanistan and Pakistan, fear, being an alien in a new country amongst many other reasons (Lipson et al, 1992; Russo et al, 2011; World Health Organisation, 2009a).

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Many described that the improvement in their safety appears to provide hope for the future:

“But I feel better here...Because it is a peaceful country, we live without tension, no bombings or anything... a rule, a law is always followed here. The people respect the laws...”

“Because every day [in Afghanistan] there is bomb blast, and a kidnapping, a murder, at that time I am a very depressed. I call every day and email to my lawyer, I want my husband here [and not in Afghanistan] because there is not a good condition...”

Many of the participants expressed that having a good future depends upon success in their family – for example their children’s success (particularly in study and employment) and safety.

One participant reported that her husband encouraged her to make her own medical doctors’ appointments as an encouragement to practice her English but many do not receive such encouragement.

The interviews with members of the Afghan community in Geelong shed light on their reflections on the links between their past and present situations, exposing the tension between the experience of leaving and the sense of belonging to one’s country of origin, and reinforced the need for refugees to have help in being able to take a more holistic view of their lives. Generally, the Afghan women interviewed said that their greatest joy was being able to get their children safely to Australia and for their children to have all the opportunities that they themselves did not have.
4.5 Learning English and building confidence in gaining employment

Miller argues that, “If students are to negotiate their identities in school settings, they need access to spoken interactions with English speakers in which their voices are heard, and their identities seen as usable capital in the first place” (Miller, 2004 in Pavlenko & Blacklege, 2004, p. 312).

As Vanderplaat (2007) argues, the role of the majority of Afghan women as the sole care givers, the division of roles and the practice of seclusion of men and women, the need to support their spouse to advance his career or study, and the pressure of social forces that encourage over commitment to extended family, are the main factors that continue to influence the lives of Afghan women even after their immigration.

Gaining access to language and employment seem to represent two of the most important challenges facing Afghanistan-born refugees in the Geelong area. Unemployment among the female population is very high and this appears to be due to a number of factors including isolation, lower literacy rates and lack of work skills because of their pre-migration experience (Rintoul 2009). Among the refugees who attempt to pursue higher education, those with lower English competencies are more likely to experience depression and its health-related consequences (Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004).

Despite individual differences among different groups of Afghan women, familiarity with common stressors, the way these stressors are understood and responded to within Afghan context, and the factors that delay their access and pursuit of language learning programs will provide an analytic tool – a tool which will provide Afghan immigrant women with practical techniques to improve their coping mechanisms, which in turn will leave a positive impact on their health, psychological well-being, and language learning success. Most of the Afghan women interviewed freely expressed their dissatisfaction with the language learning classes for refugees, but the reasons behind their dissatisfaction varied. Many found learning in the formal English lessons conducted at the Diversitat to be too challenging and they left the classes when they found them inappropriate. In many cases this appears to be directly linked to the fact that as well as having almost no capacity in English most of the women attending the classes were illiterate in Farsi/Dari. Consequently, they found it extremely difficult to engage with classes that depended upon written instructions and explanations.

The recently arrived Afghan families in Geelong said that during their first weeks in Geelong they had very little help with practical matters and struggled with simple things such as where to buy groceries, how to buy a bus ticket, how to open a bank account, and so forth. As noted above, for many, particularly for those who are illiterate, the English classes are hard for them to keep up with and understand, which results in a decrease in attendance:

“In class I would raise my hand and lie to the teacher telling her my daughter’s school called just to get out of there”, said one of women whilst laughing.”

Their lack of confidence is compounded by their difficulties communicating in English as it affects all aspects of their life in Australia. Many expressed great anxiety about communicating in English:

“When I hear people talking in English, I get short breath and just want to get out of there.”

Many illiterate participants expressed their frustration with not being able to read, with one woman saying:

“How am I going to learn English when I can’t even read or write in my own language?”

Some older Afghan women said that because of what they described as their psychological trauma, their brain ‘no longer works’. One said her brain felt “dried out” and unable to absorb anything. One middle
aged Afghan woman said she improved her language skills through cooking lessons for other immigrants and found formal English too challenging. She said:

“I do not read or write in Farsi. I cannot understand what they teach in English at Diversitat. I learn better from cooking classes and I love to cook and teach cooking.”

Another interviewee said that, as a young Afghan female, she thinks that the level of English taught at Diversitat is really too high for many of the older women, and that because they are illiterate, the lessons they received from Diversitat, which relied on written instructions, were not really suitable. An interesting response was that a young woman was in the process of initiating a language course in compliment to what Diversitat was offering. She stated that:

“The classes at Diversitat is not enough, or not easy enough for many women who are also illiterate in their own language. Having extra classes taught by Afghans may help us more.”

Cook (2010) argues that learning a second language from a native of their first language can allow learners to relate new knowledge to existing knowledge. One young mother commented that:

“If we have an Afghan person who understands our language and culture to teach us English, we will learn faster and easier.”

Another mother said that she feels that learning the language is her best way to achieve independence so that she doesn’t have to rely on her children. Her daughter who is a young girl attends English classes at Diversitat, and has picked up the language very well, to the point where she now translates for her mother.

“When I go to a doctor, one of my children will come with me to speak to the doctor. This is hard for my daughter. She has to miss school to come to doctor with me.”

Another mother mentioned that she now encourages her kids to speak English sometimes at home so she can pick it up as well.

One single Afghan woman with young children mentioned that she could not go to English classes due to looking after her two young children, but she would be happy to have a private tutor, because then she can take care of her children at home as well.

In the interviews with Afghan men in Geelong, it seemed that the older men were learning English a lot faster than the Afghan women their age. This may be because many of the men already had some basic education and were literate. They are also learning to converse in English through their interactions at work.

Most offered comments to the effect that they believe that one of the biggest barriers to progress that they faced was learning English. Some despaired of learning English but nevertheless said that they felt that if they could learn the language, many of their problems would be solved such as finding work, studying, speaking to their children, as well as being able to communicate with locals and shopkeepers. They believed that once they learn English, they will feel more at home in Australia.

“If I am educated, then I can help solve part of the problem. Education will solve issues.”

Moreover, lack of language skills seems to have impact on their confidence too. An older woman mentioned that:

“I see how some people, shopkeepers, mailman, get frustrated because I can’t communicate with them. I end up acting things out and they get what I mean, and they laugh sometimes too.”

Some younger participants also expressed their concerns that learning English was a challenge for them because, since they were attending schools, they were unable to attend Diversitat, and hence, they had no formal channels and supports to learning English.

4.6 Education, careers and work

Most participants and especially the younger Afghan youth interviewed tended to express their goals as ‘finding/getting a good job’. The kinds of jobs desired tended to be expressed as doing work that was seen to assist and contribute to their community and wider society.

Most participants expressed their willingness to contribute, belong, and become immersed in the wider-Australian community. Many participants and almost all young Afghans interviewed expressed a sense of wanting to ‘give back to Australia/the community’, after migrating to Australia (article from the Geelong Advertiser, 4th July 2017 – see appendix 1).

Learning English appears to represent a significant barrier in the minds of many of the participants, and most expressed a strong desire to improve their English skills, to acquire an education and to advance themselves:

“I feel if I work hard and achieve my goals, I can meet my family expectation to be a medical doctor.”

“After having my baby, I still want to continue with my studies.”

“I love studying. That is my goal. I want to learn new things. I want to explore the world by learning and be successful.”

“Education gives you more opportunity. Gives me more confident. So, don’t feel limited. I want to get more education.”

The younger Afghan participants interviewed generally expressed a sense of, “If you try, you can do it” attitude and that the amount of effort is relative to the rewards/optimism for their future. Most responses from the youth were optimistic.

“Nothing is impossible over here. Everything you might want
to do is possible.”

Some of the participants reported receiving some (very limited) help from Diversitat, and friends (some from outside of the community). Especially younger participants are connected with the wider communities and they get help from them when they need it.

On the other hand, some reported being forced to be more independent:

“So, I’m doing all things by myself, yes, no Centrelink no Diversitat support, any community program, not support us. Because my visa type is different from other people. That’s why it’s very difficult for me, um mostly at the beginning it was very difficult, but now it’s good...”

It is worth mentioning that many of the women interviewed have some skills such as embroidery, cooking, tailoring. Some expressed that, “even if I don’t know English, I can still work. Working is good because then I can be independent. I don’t want to take money from the government forever.”

Some women also expressed their lack of interests in doing any work, stating that their priority is helping their family. One participant stated that,

“What more I can do? I have three children and a sick husband. Even coming to Diversitat is too much for me. I help to raise to good children so that they can give back by becoming successful people.”

A young Afghan woman who is an active, studious member of the Corio community of Geelong. She arrived in Australia on a UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency Humanitarian Visa with her mother and sibling in July 2013. Arriving in Australia with limited understanding of the English language, she tirelessly put in the effort to focus on her studies, her language and community service. Over three years, she took every opportunity to volunteer at different multicultural events in Geelong such as Diversitat Youth Programs and Pako Festa. She has achieved a Certificate III in Health Services, became Vice Captain at school, and finally became the Dux of Northern Bay P-12 College in 2016. She is currently studying a Bachelor of Biomedical Science at Deakin University and a Diploma of Nursing at The Gordon. Her ambition is to become a medical doctor and help others in the rural and remote areas. She wants to give back to the community. Her enthusiasm increased after she lost her father during the war because of the lack of healthcare available.

“I was born in Afghanistan. When I was one year of age, my family fled to Pakistan where we became refugees. Pakistan and Afghanistan have been war torn countries since my birth so I never had an experience of what peace was. That was until I came to Australia. The life I now live is different in many aspects. My father has been my role model as
Country of origin, sex, age, ethnicity, and level of education all had a significant bearing on levels of confidence, ease in learning English, sense of belonging, social capital and agency.

No-one under the age of 18 was interviewed but school-aged children represent a significant proportion of the Afghan community in Geelong (the ethical challenges of interviewing children mean that studies with minors are best approached as a dedicated project). From interviews with young adults still at school, or having recently graduated it appeared that, as might be expected, those who had previously studied, or were currently studying, were not only much more comfortable using English but were doing better on all fronts than their older family members.

It is very significant that, for all of the difficulties that the women faced, girls and young women generally appeared to be doing better in terms of discipline and self-development than boys and young men. Male teenagers, in particular, were the group most likely to be suffering from adverse peer-pressure, troubles at school and delinquent behaviour. This represented a significant concern for their mothers, most of whom were widows, who struggled to inspire, guide and discipline their teenage sons. It is very possible, if exposed to malign peer-pressure and influence, that some of these teenagers and young men might become recruited into radical circles. No evidence of this occurring, however, was found in the field work conducted.

Young men who were engaged in tertiary studies or were working appeared, generally to be doing well. Some – especially those studying – had high aspirations and were feeling confident about the future. Others – especially those working in semi-skilled jobs – had more modest aspirations but were generally positive. The girls generally did better at school and the young women tended to have high aspirations and were strongly motivated to engage in further studies. Those young women who had married and had children at a younger age were generally less confident that they would be able to return to study but most thought that education and personal development, including small-business if not other careers, were important. Most young people appeared to have high levels of bridging social capital and moderate levels of bridging social capital. Several notable interviewees also spoke of engagements that suggested significant levels of linking social capital.

The older women (over 40) were generally illiterate and struggled with learning English. Many were widowed single mothers who had arrived on the Women at Risk visa program. For them, the greatest barriers to personal development, exercising agency and building social capital were building their confidence in all areas, learning English and overcoming depression and anxiety. Many younger women who had only recently arrived in Australia also spoke of their struggles with depression and anxiety, with mental health issues affecting women across all age cohorts (men were less expressive in choosing to talk about depression and anxiety).

Many women aged 25 and older, and especially mothers, spoke of their frustration in struggling to learn English. It appears likely that a different approach to learning English, one that understands the burden of illiteracy and possibly uses Dari/Farsi in instruction (i.e. rather than what is effectively ‘total immersion’ in English) could yield significantly better results. This is borne out but the experience of voluntary English classes taught by young Afghans to members of their own community, including older women (see appendix 1).

In general, the Afghan community members interviewed in Geelong felt very positive about living in Australia and the opportunities that life in Australia presented to grow and develop, if not so much for themselves then at least for their children. Many had some experience of discrimination and racism but most were sanguine about racists representing only a small minority of Australians. The young (18-25) and younger (25-40) women were generally very motivated to seize opportunities to develop themselves. Most valued education and were keen to develop their careers, or at least go into business. Confidence, English proficiency and depression and anxiety represented the major barriers to personal and group development.
FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

Building upon the key findings outlined in the report above, the research team intends to pursue the following four minor research projects. These mini projects will draw on the interview material already collected for this RIOSC project together with additional interviews undertaken using resources at Deakin Business School and the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation.

1. Barriers Afghanistan women face in building capacity and exercising in their agency - Case studies / stories of five (5) Afghan women with families

Migration is a common phenomenon of the globalisation era. In this article, the team will explore the interplay of three foundational concepts in the migration experiences of Afghanistan refugees in Victoria: citizenship and identity. Through our analysis we examine the multiple layers of being an immigrant and refugee citizen. As reflected in empirical studies with members of this community, we have observed tensions between inclusion and exclusion, equality and difference, work and family as well as gender role transformation, family restructuring, and generational differences. These issues are discussed in the context of the development of active citizenship and building capacity and exercising in their agency. Being more control of their lives, more autonomous and independence have been found to be a core process in the enactment of citizenship, the promotion of a sense of belonging and deeply related to identity formation. Identity as an overarching perspective, with its personal and collective meanings, plays an important role at the intersection between citizenship and exercising their agency.

2. Career, migration, the transformation and adaptation for Afghanistan migrants

In response to the precarious and disadvantaged position of Afghanistan refugees in Victoria, Australia, marked by unemployment, under employment and loss of career capital, the research team will draw upon material collected for this report in order to develop a relational cultural paradigm and a life design career model in order to better understand migrant / refugee work life and factors that shape the career interventions, with a focus on examining the implications for vocational practice. As migrants traverse multiple life contexts, they are confronted with daunting challenges that threaten basic needs for survival and belonging. This is particularly true for forced migrants, that is to say refugees and asylum seekers who find themselves in a disadvantaged position in a new country, not just because they come from situations of conflict, war, and human rights abuses, but also due to their tenuous legal and socioeconomic position. A lack of awareness and utilisation in their destination countries of migrants’ skills, qualifications and experiences (gained in their country of origin or as part of the process of migration) leaves them unprepared to express the full extent of their knowledge and education; and prevents them from contributing to the local or national economy to their full potential. Thus, unemployment and underemployment become dominant themes in the lives of migrants as they are required to fit into existing systems and procedures with which they are unfamiliar. Negative attitudes and prejudices further undermine skills, knowledge and self-efficacy, resulting in hidden and unrecognised talents and disruptions in identity. As a result, the position of migrants becomes the defining feature for many of these individuals. The position of being a refugee has traditionally been associated with feelings of loss and bereavement, resulting in support models that perpetuated an identity of a refugee as a helpless victim. This further research aims to understand the mechanisms of career exploration among professional Afghan refugees in Australia. Specifically, the research aims to investigate key individual-level factors including proactive personality, resilience, career optimism, and cultural intelligence and examine how these factors influence the career exploration of Afghan refugees. This is an important area of investigation as it has the potential to reveal mechanisms through which refugees can be more effective in their search for careers in Australia. Such effectiveness in career exploration could have a long-term positive social impact as it is key to helping new migrants / refugees integrate better and become productive members of the Australian community.
3. Exploring barriers in English education in the case of Afghanistan refugees in Geelong

Growing as refugees, many young people are eager to attain higher education and learn English but lack the opportunities and freedoms their non-refugee peers enjoy as they transition into adulthood and look for meaningful ways to support themselves. This research will further explore three main assumptions surrounding barriers to higher education. This report concludes that higher education could be both a means to refugee empowerment and a form of empowerment.

4. Generational Differences Amongst Afghans in Geelong and Dandenong on Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Many younger Afghans express an interest in making a contribution to Australian society. Those who have had the opportunity to undertake secondary and tertiary studies in Australia have begun to become involved in various voluntary activities, both in the wider community and in serving within the Afghanistan community. Some have also become engaged in running for public office at the local government level. This project will examine the enabling factors that facilitate their involvement in public service and activism and the forces that shape their civic awareness and motivate their engagement. It will also analyse the generational differences between younger and older Afghans in their bonding and bridging social capital formations.


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APPENDIX 1

Article ‘Barrier Busters’ from The Geelong Advertiser, 4th November 2017 (p. 33-34)