

# **A Benchmark Model for the Process of Post-Migration Social Adjustment: Exploring the Views of Young People from Forced-Migration Backgrounds in Australia**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was to propose a benchmark model for the process of post-migration social adjustment based on the points of view and experiences of young individuals from forced-migration backgrounds.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Twelve young adults (18 to 24 years) living in Australia with an experience of forced migration and from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds were recruited. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed through thematic analysis.

**Findings:** The results showed that post-migration social adjustment requires effective interactions within individual, family, and community domains. The participants proposed specific characteristics, enablers, and barriers for each domain that can affect the process of social adjustment after the experience of forced migration.

**Originality:** Based on the reported points of view and experiences of our participants, we proposed an ecological model that can be considered as a preliminary benchmark to inform policymaking, research, and services focusing on the social adjustment of young refugees. The practical implications for resettlement programs are discussed.

**Keywords:** Forced migration; social adjustment; refugee resettlement; young people; qualitative research

## **Introduction**

People with the experience of forced migration are a considerable proportion of the global population. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently 82.4 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, around half of which are young people under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2021). For forcibly displaced people, resettlement in a third country is an important safety mechanism, but it can be also the beginning of many new challenges for them when they are resettled in a country with a completely different sociocultural context. Resettlement programs in the host countries are mainly focused on the basic needs of forcibly replaced individuals (e.g., housing), and they usually do not include specific plans to address the challenges of post-migration social adjustment (Parajuli & Horey, 2019; Scharpf & Hecker, 2021; Taylor & Haintz, 2017).

While basic factors like housing and employment are necessary for post-migration adjustment, they do not seem sufficient to overcome the challenges of social adjustment after the experience of forced migration. There are a range of psychosocial stressors that can impact the process of social adjustment after forced migration. Experiencing complex traumas before, during, and after forced migration, in addition to acculturation stress (i.e., the stress of adjusting to new cultural norms), and isolation stress (i.e., feelings of loneliness and loss of social support network) can hinder the process of post-migration social adjustment, especially for young people (Ellis *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, current resettlement programs in the host countries need to update their policies and practice to address more effectively the challenges of post-migration social adjustment for forcibly displaced people. The first step for this aim is to have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics of post-migration social adjustment based on the voice of individuals with lived experiences. The current study attempted to address this beginning step through a qualitative study.

### *Young Refugees and Post-Migration Social Adjustment*

When forced migration is experienced in childhood and adolescence, it can be more difficult to adjust to the different sociocultural contexts of the new country. Individuals in these sensitive age periods are less equipped with the psychological capacities required for coping with extraordinary stressors associated with forced migration. At the same time, some psychological characteristics of adolescence and early adulthood (e.g., identity confusion and defiance against social norms) can add extra challenges to the difficulties with developing social adjustment (Berk, 2007; Buchanan *et al.*, 2018). In addition, youth from refugee backgrounds often experience mixed expectations from their family and ethnic community on the one hand and from the host society on the other hand which can put extra barriers to their social adjustment (Greischel *et al.*, 2019; Rousseau *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, even years after resettlement, many young refugees may still deal with the long-term effects of past traumatic experiences on their mental health (Groen *et al.*, 2018; Hou *et al.*, 2020), and their psychosocial adjustment can be further hindered by the experiences of individual or systemic racism, discrimination, social exclusion (Alemi & Stempel, 2018; Berry *et al.*, 2006; Correa-Velez *et al.*, 2015; Sangalang *et al.*, 2019), and barriers to appropriate employment and financial security (Disney & McPherson, 2020).

### *Current Research and Practice Gaps*

The predominant focus of past research literature among young refugees has been mostly on highlighting poor mental health outcomes (Hou *et al.*, 2020), and acculturation (d'Abreu, *et al.*, 2019). However, little attention has been paid to identifying and facilitating post-migration social adjustment in youth with a forced migration background. The ability to adjust in different domains of one's social life is one of the most important determining factors for mental health and social performance, as poor social adjustment can predict significant issues such as mental health disorders and anti-social behaviors (Bosc, *et al.*, 1997;

Hua *et al.*, 2019; Weissman, 1975; Weissman, *et al.*, 1981). Therefore, it is important to understand the specific process of post-migration social adjustment as well as its barriers and enablers for young people who have experienced forced migration. This understanding can inform current policymaking, research, and resettlement programs to better support the social adjustment of young people with a forced migration background.

### *The Present Study*

The current research aimed to present a pilot study to inform a comprehensive model of post-migration social adjustment that is based on the points of view and experiences of young people resettled in Australia following their forced migration. We argue that young people from forced migration backgrounds can be the best source of information to understand the challenges and difficulties during the resettlement process. Their voice is essential for finding and planning ways to support their social adjustment in the resettlement context. Unlike many previous studies, we were not focused on a specific theory-based approach, quantitative methods, or a specific population of refugees (i.e., from a certain ethnic or cultural background). Instead, we qualitatively studied a diverse group of young people from refugee backgrounds coming from multiple countries, different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and with varying durations of residency in Australia (e.g., migrating in childhood vs coming in late adolescence). Based on the common points of view and experiences of our participants, we proposed a comprehensive model of factors that can facilitate or inhibit post-migration social adjustment. To our knowledge, this is the first scientific attempt to present a comprehensive understanding of post-migration social adjustment based on the voice of young people with forced migration backgrounds. Although this study is a pilot study with a limited sample size and generalizability scope, the findings can provide valuable insight for research, policies, and services focusing on forcibly displaced young people.

### **Methods**

### *Participants*

The participants of this study were 12 young adults aged between 18 and 24 years with an average age of 20.6 years ( $SD = 2.3$ ) all currently living in Australia. Five participants reported being female, and seven participants were male. Most participants (10 of 12) were single, and two participants reported their marital status as de facto. The participants were from a diverse range of countries and with different durations of residing in Australia. However, all participants migrated to Australia either in their childhood or adolescence. The participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1

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The eligibility criteria for participation in this study were: 1- being in the age range of 18 to 24 years, 2- Having an approved refugee status, and 3- Being proficient in English. Although these eligibility criteria would limit the generalizability and recruitment process, they were considered consistent with the scope of this research which was to present a “benchmark model of post-migration adjustment”. Having an approved refugee status and being proficient in the language of the host country could be considered as two potential indicators of post-migration settlement. These individuals (having some level of settlement) would be the most suitable participants as they could share their experiences about successful processes of post-migration adjustment that could potentially inform a “benchmark” model of social adjustment.

### *Procedure*

The ethics approval for this research was obtained by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the first author's affiliated university. The main strategies for recruiting participants were snowball sampling, distributing flyers via print and online forms, as well as

collaborating with organizations delivering services to young people. The eligibility criteria were being aged between 18 and 24 years and having experience of forced migration.

Individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data from eligible participants. Interviews were conducted either in person (in a private office) or over the phone by the first author. Prior to each interview, written informed consent was obtained for participation in an audio-recorded interview. After completing the interviews, participants were compensated with \$25 gift cards. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. However, no participants withdrew prior to, during, or after data collection.

In designing our semi-structured interviews, we did not follow a specific theoretical approach. Rather, we asked about varying domains of one's social life from individual domains to general and systemic factors that can potentially affect social adjustment (e.g., factors related to the host society).

An example question is "What are the characteristics of young adults who are sufficiently engaged in social roles, groups, and communities?" For each social life domain (e.g., relationships with peers, family members, communities), participants were encouraged to share their ideas and experiences about the ideal process of adjustment as well as the potential barriers and enablers for having appropriate adjustment in that certain social domain.

### *Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis based on an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the data using NVivo 12 software. Accordingly, the analysis was data-driven without the guidance of a theoretical framework. All responses of the participants to the questions were coded line by line with specific codes that were consistent with the content of their statements. Then higher-order codes and final themes were created based on the observed

similarities between the elementary codes. At least half of the participants contributed to each of the themes introduced as final themes in the results section.

The first and second authors independently coded a subset of transcripts and disagreements between them were resolved through discussion and modification of codes. This process was continued until a full consensus was achieved. All the authors reviewed the themes until a consensus on the final higher-order themes was obtained.

It is important to note that the analyses were conducted based on a phenomenological approach (Willig, 2013). That means that we only were focused on the described perception and subjective experiences of our participants on the phenomenon (i.e., post-migration social adjustment). Therefore, the conceptualizations presented in the results section are largely descriptive, based on the reported points of view and experiences of the participants without any theoretical formulation. However, the discussion section includes a more interpretative approach to discuss the potential implications of the data for resettlement programs and policy making. These sequential descriptive/interpretive steps are recommended while using thematic analysis based on a phenomenological epistemology (Willig, 2013).

## **Results**

Based on the original codes, higher order codes, and basic themes, three general themes emerged as the final themes of our analyses: 1- The individual journey and efforts in developing post-migration social adjustment; 2- Family as support for post-migration social adjustment; 3- The context of the host society as the facilitator of post-migration social adjustment.

The above-mentioned themes emerged as interrelated concepts that interact with each other in an ecological framework. Accordingly, individual characteristics and efforts in developing post-migration social adjustment occur in the context of family, and both individual and family aspects of social adjustment can be facilitated or inhibited by the

dynamics of the host society. Conversely, changes within *the* host society and family can have a downward influence on individual efforts. The final themes and the relationships between them are shown in Figure 1. The details of our analyses regarding each theme are presented in the following sections.

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### **Individual Journey for Building Post-Migration Social Adjustment**

Based on the points of view of our participants, fostering post-migration social adjustment requires several personal characteristics and effort shown in a variety of ways. The participants highlighted eight personal characteristics that can support positive social adjustment: being hardworking, fluency in the language of the host country, having an approach (rather than avoidance) orientation to one's social life, good mental health, openness to asking for help, openness to new sociocultural values and norms in the host society, purposefulness, and self-confidence and self-esteem. The conceptualization of these domains based on the points of view and experiences of the participants as well as exemplar quotes for each domain are presented below.

#### *Being Hardworking*

Our participants reported that post-migration social adjustment cannot be achieved unless migrant young people are hardworking. Specifically, educational progress, meeting the standards and requirements of a job, and determination in following personal goals for future pathways were specified by the participants as the areas requiring hard work. As one participant stated:

'Something that really helped me is to be focused and to take every step carefully in my life ... I believe when you're best at something, everything comes after you rather than you're chasing after things ... just be your best in whatever you do ... I tried to study in a way that I choose university rather than university choosing me ... I achieved that by being focused, studying hard ... That strong belief that if I do [my] best, if I try hard, I can achieve things, and nothing can stop me.'



### *Fluency in the Language of the Host Country*

Participants stated that language proficiency is a basic and fundamental skill that can be considered an enabler of many other aspects of post-migration social adjustment. If it is developed sufficiently and at the early stages of the resettlement process, it can facilitate other essential aspects such as employment and connectedness to peers. In contrast, a lack of language proficiency can create significant barriers to connecting with the host society and inhibit post-migration social adjustment. One participant said: 'I came to Australia with no English ... So, it was quite hard for me to find friends and to feel that sense of belonging to the school I was in.'

### *Having an Approach (as opposed to avoidant) View of One's Social Life*

This theme was one of the most frequently highlighted concepts by our participants. Based on the participants' points of view and experiences, successful post-migration social adjustment can be achieved when a person has an open mind in social situations and actively tries to build new social and interpersonal relationships. One of the highlighted aspects of this theme was trying to be sociable and outgoing. One participant said: 'Smiling to my friends and that's how other friends love me... it was out of my control but automatically I got engaged in that sense of belonging to my Australian friends.'

In addition, the participants had a strong emphasis on being open to communication and enhancing communication/conflict negotiation skills as a major enabler for building post-migration social adjustment. A participant mentioned: 'Communication is always a big thing. ... Just talking with everyone; talking to a diverse amount of people; getting to know different opinions, different thoughts, different lives'. In reference to the enablers of post-migration social adjustment, another participant said: 'Trying to solve problem ... if there's any problem in like a group of your friends, try to solve it instead of isolating yourself from them.'

Moreover, the participants believed that engagement in a new social life in the host country requires a significant level of effort and perseverance in exposing themselves to different social situations and trying to maintain social networks. For example, in reference to the characteristics of socially adjusted young individuals, one participant stated:

‘They're like really involved and always just go out. Like even if they're not good at something ... so give everything a try. So, if they want to like join a group of people, even if they don't know anything, they'll still go and talk to them and just like you should get involved in everything.’

#### *Mental Health*

As quoted by a participant ‘Mental health is a big aspect for young people and that would probably in so many ways inhibit them from having a meaningful relationship.’ This point was similar to other remarks made by several participants with regard to the role of mental health in post-migration social adjustment. The participants asserted that if young people have unsolved mental health issues, this can significantly inhibit them from engaging sufficiently with social life and building an appropriate level of social adjustment.

#### *Openness for Asking for Help*

Our participants asserted that in the process of adjusting to their post-migration social life, young individuals should be open to asking for help when it is needed. It can be asking for information, skill learning, or even seeking professional help for mental health issues (e.g., social anxiety) that can inhibit engagement with social life. For example, one of the participants said: ‘If it's a major issue or something ... if you have like social anxiety ... if it's something serious ... make sense for sure seeking therapy.’

#### *Openness to New Sociocultural Values and Norms of the Host Society*

Our participants referred to the difference between the sociocultural norms of their country of origin and the host country as a major challenge. They stated that facing the huge sociocultural difference during the process of forced migration is like a ‘shock’, and the way

of coping with that is a determining factor for success or failure in building post-migration social adjustment. The participants asserted that the best way to cope with this challenge is to have an open mind to different sociocultural norms and ideas. Accordingly, young people need to be open to adapting to social expectations that may be different from what they have previously experienced in their country of origin. For example, one participant said: ‘If you come from a different culture ... if you’re living in the West ... just being able to adapt into the various cultural roles and having respect and accepting that as your culture.’

### *Purposefulness*

The participants referred to “having specific long-term goals” as one of the most important personal aspects of post-migration social adjustment. Some of the participants generally referred to the concept of having long-term goals, but others specifically referred to having goals for future professional and educational pathways. Moreover, the participants emphasized that a lack of purposefulness can be an important barrier to post-migration social adjustment. For example, in reference to the barriers of social adjustment, one participant said: ‘One most important thing would be lack of having a clear purpose of [the] future. If you don't have that one, you're not gonna have effective communication; you're not gonna be focused and you're not gonna try hard.’

### *Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem*

Finally, self-confidence and self-esteem were highlighted as important aspects of post-migration social adjustment at the individual level. Participants stated that regardless of the external conditions, young people need to build a high level of self-value and believe in their abilities to adjust to post-migration social life. They highlighted the lack of self-esteem and self-confidence as one of the most important barriers to building social adjustment in the host society. In contrast, they emphasized that stable and unconditional self-esteem can facilitate

post-migration social adjustment. For example, in reference to the enablers of post-migration social adjustment, one participant said:

‘I used to think that it was [about] looking like Australians, top Australians; looking like them more ... but I think now I realize it’s more [about] having confidence ... that it’s okay to be different ... it’s like self-acceptance I think.’

### **Family as a platform for developing post-migration social adjustment**

Based on the points of view and experiences of the participants, the family environment is a critically important dimension supporting post-migration social adjustment. The participants asserted that the personal efforts of young people for building social adjustment can be facilitated or hindered by family, especially parents. Specifically, the participants referred to three main aspects of family environment and relationships that can influence post-migration social adjustment: 1- Acceptance and openness to different ideas; 2- Compromising between the cultures of origin and the host society; 3- Emotional support. The conceptualization of these three aspects, as well as the exemplar quotes, are presented below.

#### *Familial Acceptance and Openness to Different Ideas*

Our participants reported that the process of post-migration social adjustment can be significantly facilitated when family members, especially parents accept and acknowledge young individuals’ sociocultural changes. In contrast, when parents have high levels of prejudice or defensiveness against the culture of the host country, it can hinder young people from connecting to the new society and adjusting to its sociocultural norms. One participant said:

‘My parents have strong views ... but because I’m mostly like in this culture now I’m developing my own views and I’m learning different things. So, I think characteristic [for building social adjustment] could be being openminded that things are different ... I think young people from different backgrounds, they adapt very quickly, but the parents, they’re less open-minded to different things.’

#### *Compromising between the Cultures of Origin and the Host Society*

Based on the point of view of the participants, another important factor in a family environment is how young people react to perceived pressure from their family for retaining their culture of origin. Despite their strong emphasis on being open to the culture of the host country, none of the participants mentioned that they need to completely disconnect from their culture of origin. Instead, the participants highlighted that a compromise should be achieved inside the family environment. Accordingly, young people need to reach a balance between following their culture of origin (as their families encourage) and accepting the culture of the host country. In other words, post-migration social adjustment can be facilitated when young migrants feel that they belong to a broad culture that is a combination of the cultures of their family and the host society. In describing this point, one participant stated: ‘being [a] part of [a] broad culture ... like be[ing] Australian and being [a] part of Somalia [Somalian culture].’

### *Emotional Support*

Emotional support was the most highlighted aspect of the family environment as a determinant of post-migration social adjustment. The participants mentioned that having satisfying family relationships and receiving emotional support from family is essential for post-migration social adjustment. They considered this factor as a foundation for developing social adjustment outside the family environment. For example, a participant said:

‘If you got a strong foundation at home, then you do learn because we learn a lot of things, we get a lot of our characteristics in families. And so, if we have this strong foundation at home, in this loving, respectful relation[ships] at home, then we automatically have those characteristics [characteristics of social adjustment] within ourselves then we learn to spread it on the outside world, outside of our home.’

### **The Context of the Host Society as a Facilitator of Post-Migration Social Adjustment**

In addition to the personal and family domains, the participants also referred to a few determining factors for post-migration social adjustment that are beyond the scope of

personal efforts or family relationships. These factors are relevant to the role of major policies and sociocultural dynamics in the context of the host society that is not under the control of young migrants or their families. These contextual factors can be categorized into four subthemes: 1- Financial security; 2- organizational support; 3- inclusive environment and appreciation of cultural diversity; 4- and supportive social network. The conceptualization of these aspects as well as the exemplar quotes from the participants are presented below.

### *Financial Security*

The participants highlighted the importance of financial security as a determining factor for social adjustment that requires support and facilitation by governmental stakeholders in the host country. The participants considered the lack of financial security as one of the most important barriers to post-migration social adjustment because all basic needs are reliant on this factor, and it can affect all aspects of one's personal and social life. One of the participants said: 'When you don't have a stable financial income that causes so many other things; you won't be able to afford accommodation, and also that includes a lot of stress that people have.'

### *Organizational Support*

The participants believed that some types of organizational support are needed to facilitate the social engagement of young people from a forced migration background with their domestic peers and the local community. Accordingly, some official organizations in the host country are needed to be easily available for young people from forced-migration backgrounds and provide them with appropriate opportunities to connect with local communities and groups. This is different from current social and educational services in which young people from refugee backgrounds are excluded from their local peers. A participant said:

‘... These social groups for these people [young people from forced-migration backgrounds] to come to ... and I guess slowly start to conform to these norms [of the host country], then to the new culture, the new language. So, some of these social groups can have gatherings like youth gathering or youth groups before our age [young adulthood] ... and I think like in universities or in high school ... So, I mean, like [in] my high school, we had different clubs, people could kind of attend to and make new friends which increases their social skills, but also just doing things that they enjoy, to make them feel more at home.’

Based on the point of view of the participants, the organizations also need to provide specific interventions and programs meeting the unique needs of young people from forced migration backgrounds. These can be programs to teach young people about expected social norms and skills in the host society or professional mental health interventions that can help to improve the psychological capacities of social adjustment. A participant said:

‘Having that supports there can be very helpful for young people ... to adjust to that social changing like adjustment ... professional support like counseling for example like psychological interventions to help them being able to adjust to that difference ... because this is always like a shock coming to a different country with a completely different culture.’

### *Inclusive Environment and Appreciation of Cultural Diversity*

In terms of inclusive sociocultural environment and appreciation of cultural diversity, participants referred to three main factors that can have significant effects on post-migration social adjustment. The first factor highlighted by participants was individual discrimination. The participants stated that the experience of being attacked by racist or discriminatory behaviors can considerably disrupt the process of post-migration social adjustment. They highlighted that even a limited number of such experiences can make a young person to avoid the opportunities for social engagement in the host society. One participant said: ‘They gonna have that mindset: that's all ... last time I joined this group, this happened so, I'm not gonna join any other group’.

The second factor highlighted by the participants was systemic discrimination. The participants stated that there are some types of subtle systemic discrimination that although is

not as hurtful as individual discrimination, still can inhibit young people from confidently adjusting to the host society. For example, one of the participants referred to the experience of systemic exclusion of refugee students from Australian students in school activities as it was associated with the feeling of perceived discrimination:

‘I think doing activities like bringing people together not separating them because when I was in primary school... [there was] pretty [much] no inclusion ... they used to put me in separate programs and stuff and that was good like I needed it, but I felt like left out. So, I think I didn’t like the separation. I thought that was like you felt different, even though you had your group of people, but you know; you still wanna fit in with everyone ... So, they used to do that ... I didn’t like that when they used to like separate us.’

The third subtheme referred to the general culture of the host society that needs to be inclusive and welcoming to youth from forced migration backgrounds. This is not simply equal to the lack of individual and systemic racism, but rather it refers to a perceiving appreciation for cultural diversity. Accordingly, when people of the host country are open to accepting and connecting with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, it can significantly facilitate the process of post-migration social adjustment. One participant said: ‘Not discriminating [against] anyone of different backgrounds and cultures, and just seeing everyone as like a noble human being ... They're all important in their own ways and [with] having their values and opinions that we should pay respect towards them.’ Another participant said: ‘Allowing them [young people from refugee backgrounds] to talk about their culture and being their culture and not just like you have to leave everything behind ... like just accept everything they’re doing like their whole culture ... like acknowledging the person’s background so they feel like more accepted.’

### *Supportive Social Network*

Finally, developing supportive social networks in the host society (e.g., peers, social groups, workplace colleagues) emerged as another important aspect of the process of post-migration social adjustment. The participants stated that having a supportive social network



with members of the host society can facilitate social engagement and can enable young people to cope better with the stresses of post-migration social adjustment. One of the participants said: ‘They [young people from forced-migration backgrounds] get too stressed, and they don't have anyone to help them [to] support them or help them [to] go through. So, I think it's important to have people supporting that.’

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to present a benchmark model of post-migration social adjustment for young people with forced migration backgrounds. Although post-migration challenges have been frequently studied, past research has been mostly focused on simply describing specific mental health problems or resettlement issues for refugee populations. To the knowledge of the authors, the main scope of this research which was “exploring a benchmark model of social adjustment based on the point of view of refugee population” has not been previously the focus of the previous studies in either youth or adult populations. The novel aspect of our study was that we considered young people from refugee backgrounds as a valid and essential source of information to conceptualize and propose an ideal model of the resettlement process supporting post-migration social adjustment. Our approach positioned young people from forced migration backgrounds as experts in their own experiences and desired social adjustment outcomes. We specifically targeted young adults from refugee populations because of the importance and sensitivity of their developmental stage (early adulthood) for developing long-term psychosocial adjustment.

All young people who participated in this study had experienced a challenging journey of forced migration in their childhood or adolescence prior to being resettled in Australia, and they were eager to share their experiences and opinions to propose a benchmark resettlement process that can support post-migration social adjustment. We argue that such groups of young people are the most qualified experts to conceptualize effective patterns of

resettlement process in the host countries. In this section, based on the points of view of our participants, we formulate a functioning model for developing post-migration social adjustment, and then we discuss the practical implications of these findings for the current resettlement programs and policymaking.

#### *A benchmark process of post-migration social adjustment*

Based on our findings, post-migration social adjustment is a multi-dimensional and ecological concept that needs an effective interaction between three levels: Individual efforts, family environment, and the sociocultural context of the host society. Participants placed a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and effort in the process of resettlement. This aspect of social adjustment has not been a focus of the past research literature. Past research has mostly portrayed refugees as a vulnerable population that is passive victims of external conditions and therefore requires changes to external factors such as financial conditions, mental health, and social services (Ghorashi, 2005; Steimel, 2010). However, our participants highlighted that although post-migration social adjustment is a difficult process, young individuals play an active role, and their individual effort is a significant predictor for achieving healthy social adjustment. The individual effort includes learning the language of the host country, being hardworking, increasing openness and engagement in new social situations and roles, developing long-term goals, being resilient and confident in coping with stressors, and actively seeking information and professional help to protect their mental health and promote their social adjustment. Some of the personal factors addressed by our participants have been highlighted in previous studies as potential predictors of social adjustment (e.g., openness and engagement in social situations in Buote *et al.*, 2016; language proficiency in Buchanan *et al.*, 2018, El Khoury, 2019; purposefulness in Kim *et al.*, 2015; healthy and active coping styles in Woltin *et al.*, 2018). However, no study was specifically

focused on exploring personal factors of post-migration social adjustment based on the experiences of young people with forced migration experience.

Our participants asserted that personal effort may not be sufficient to achieve social adjustment if one's family does not provide appropriate support. This is also consistent with the findings of past research showing that family environment is a determining factor for developing post-migration social adjustment (Birman and Tran, 2008; Copolov and Knowles, 2021; Juang *et al.*, 2018; Rousseau *et al.*, 2004). Our findings highlighted that family is a basic platform and foundation for the personal efforts of developing social adjustment. Our participants asserted that social adjustment can be facilitated when family members support young people to explore the culture of the host country. Family also plays an important role as an emotional foundation for young people to feel supported when they are going through the hard journey of adjusting to post-migration life. Overall, these findings highlight that the social adjustment of young refugees cannot be addressed without paying special attention to their family environment.

However, our participants highlighted that both individual efforts and family environment can play a positive role in social adjustment provided that there is a supportive sociocultural context in the host society. This context includes both official (e.g., governmental) stakeholders and the greater public in the host society. In terms of official support, our participants highlighted the importance of supporting financial security and providing appropriate opportunities for social engagement, education, and mental health services.

In terms of the general public, participants highlighted experiences of perceived discrimination and exclusion by domestic people as one of the major barriers to developing post-migration social adjustment. This is consistent with past research showing the pervasive negative effects of perceived discrimination on the social adjustment of young people from refugee backgrounds (Alemi and Stempel, 2018; Correa-Velez *et al.*, 2015; Montgomery and

Foldspang, 2008; Sangalang *et al.*, 2019). Based on our participants' view, the best sociocultural context for developing social adjustment is an inclusive environment that welcomes and acknowledges young people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and provides them with appropriate social networks among domestic people despite their cultural diversity.

### *Practical Implications*

Our findings imply that centering the perspective of young people (as opposed to governmental and political perspectives) can provide practical insights into determining required policies for resettlement programs. Based on our findings, we argue that an effective resettlement program needs coherent coordination between various stakeholders including those who oversee educational, social work, and mental health services for both refugee and non-refugee populations. An effective model of resettlement must engage not only young individuals from forced-migration backgrounds and their family members but also their peers from the host country, educational system, and relevant governmental and non-governmental social organizations. That means these services for young people and the related policies must be clearly linked and work together in a systemic way. For example, services focusing on the mental health of young individuals may not be effective when they are disconnected from services that should address family education and financial security at the same time.

Similarly, all policies and services focusing on educating young refugees to adjust to the host society must include their domestic peers as well to improve the culture of diversity appreciation and prevent the developing of racist and discriminatory cultural views among new generations of the host population. This point needs specific attention in both research and practice as it can have a significant contribution to preventing the culture of racism in the host countries.

The current research literature and resettlement programs are mostly focused on only refugee and migrant populations overlooking the important factors in the sociocultural context of the host society that can significantly affect the social adjustment of young refugees. We argue that as young people from refugee backgrounds are new members of the host society, their social adjustment and mental health cannot be considered disconnected from other members of the society. All the efforts at individual and family levels to promote social adjustment can reach to desired outcomes when the host society is accepting and supporting the new members as equal members of the society despite all their ethnic or cultural differences. This is a difficult goal to achieve and requires long-term and comprehensive policies to promote inclusive and welcoming culture in the host countries. However, if the relevant stakeholders address this issue adequately, this not only can facilitate the process of post-migration adjustment but also can promote the social adjustment of the general population in the host country by improving social connectedness between all members of the society.

#### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

The findings of this study should be considered a preliminary pilot study to present a benchmark model of resettlement for improving post-migration social adjustment. Despite efforts to include a diverse sample, the results of this research cannot be generalized to young individuals from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds that have not been included in this study or to those who have experienced different systems of resettlement programs in Australia or other countries.

In addition, all participants in this study had approved refugee status and were fluent or proficient in the English language. This means that the participants of this research have already had some appropriate levels of adjustment to the host society. Although this was consistent with the aim of this study (i.e., presenting a benchmark model of social

adjustment), the findings could be more representative by including some participants from people who were in the process of seeking asylum or were not fluent in English. However, one of the reasons for considering these eligibility criteria was that the focus of this research was specifically to present a “benchmark” model of adjustment. Therefore, those young people who already had some levels of settlement (e.g., completing the legal processes of forced migration and getting fluent in the language of the host country) would be the most suitable participants to inform a comprehensive benchmark model of post-migration social adjustment.

There were limitations to this research in accessing a representative number of young people seeking asylum and recruiting interpreters. We recommend that future studies should not limit their participants to those who are fluent in the language of the host country or to approved refugees.

This pilot study needs to be replicated with different populations of young people with forced migration backgrounds in Australia and other host countries. The replication of this research can help to finally reach a global view of what can be proposed as a comprehensive ecological model of the resettlement process that can support developing post-migration social adjustment.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides valuable insights into the perspectives of young people resettled in Australia and their ideas about how to facilitate healthy social adjustment in their new country. Participants highlighted the importance of an ecological and systemic view to support post-migration social adjustment that can address the relevant dynamics between individual, family, and community aspects. Based on this model, an effective resettlement program must center the young people’s points of view and create a coherent connection between key stakeholders, policymakers, and service providers.

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