

## **Experiences of Perceived Exclusion by Migrants and Refugees in Australia**

**Abstract:** Research shows that the many difficulties and challenges encountered by migrants and refugees in the post-migration context can become an impediment to successful resettlement efforts (Colic-Piesker & Tilbury, 2003; Casimiro, Hancock & Northcote, 2007). Recent research from the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion series indicates that at the community level, neighbourhoods with low socioeconomic status and high cultural diversity (where recent migrants are most likely to settle) are below the national average in terms of support for multiculturalism and social cohesion (The Australian Community, 2013). These findings are worrying as they suggest that economic and social disadvantage coupled with low levels of social cohesion affect prosperity, productivity and social harmony in the long term (The Australian Community, 2013). Accordingly, the current study seeks to understand how post-migration experiences of migrants and refugees (including perceptions of social cohesion) affect their wellbeing. A particular focus is on the experiences of acculturative stress and the subsequent coping strategies which are employed. Initial interview data with 40 participants, from various ethnic backgrounds indicate that perceived subtle discrimination is a major acculturative stressor for migrants and refugees in Australia. This paper discusses the findings from in depth interviews with migrants concerning their experiences of stress and coping strategies in the post-migration context.

### **Introduction**

Approximately seven million migrants have called Australia home since the establishment of the immigration department in 1945 (Phillips, Klapdor & Simon-Davies, 2010; Phillips & Spinks, 2012). In recent years between 2012-13 migration to Australia has totalled 214, 019, which is an increase from 198, 747 in 2011-12 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2014). Permanent migration into Australia occurs through two distinct channels, either through the Migration program for skilled and family migrants or through the

Humanitarian Program for refugees and those in situations that are refugee-like (Phillips & Spinks, 2012).

In addition to the influx of immigrants, the number of refugees and displaced persons resettled in Australia has totalled to 700,000 since 1945 (Karlsen, Phillips, & Koleth, 2011). Australia is obliged to accept a certain number of refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention and also refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are also resettled by Australia (Karlsen et al., 2011).

As the number of migrants and refugees permanently entering Australia increase each year, concern for their well-being in the post-migration context is paramount. The current literature argues that the resettlement experience is fraught with challenges and difficulties and can be just as stressful as the pre-migration journey (Porter & Haslam, 2005; Colic-Piesker & Tilbury, 2003; Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010). Factors including language barrier, lack of employment, perceived discrimination and racism, isolation, and encountering general cultural differences can negatively affect the well-being of migrants and refugees which can impede successful resettlement efforts (Colic-Piesker & Tilbury, 2003; Casimiro et al., 2007).

The phrases ‘resettlement’, ‘post-migration’, ‘relocation’ and ‘settlement’ are used interchangeably in the literature and this paper will follow in that vein. Valtonen (2004, p. 70), suggests that resettlement involves ‘the activities and processes of becoming established after arrival in the country of settlement’. Resuming the feeling that life is “back to normal” is a critical factor which can influence well-being in the adopted country (Colic-Piesker & Tilbury, 2003, p. 62). An important factor to note is that feeling socially included with the broader community at all levels is essential in order to have a ‘sense of control’ over one’s life and a ‘normal life’ (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Brough, Gorman, Ramirez & Westoby 2003; Colic-Piesker & Tilbury 2003).

The topic of stress immediately brings to mind the need for effective coping strategies. According to research, migrants and refugees engage in various coping strategies, such as religious coping, seeking social support, cognitive strategies and other more culturally specific forms of coping (Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman, 2002; Lee, & Chan, 2009; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Goodman, 2004).

However, certain strategies, such as suppression of memories which trigger distress, may mask underlying problems that can become problematic in the future (Goodman, 2004). Therefore, it is important to explore and gain insight into the current coping strategies used by migrants and refugees to manage their post-migration stresses.

A predominant aim of the current research project is to investigate the relationships between stress, wellbeing and coping strategies. Migrant and refugee participants in the present study recounted the many challenges they are encountering or have experienced during the process of resettling in Australia. In particular the difficulties pertaining to experiences of perceived subtle discrimination and various other post-migration experiences can evoke feelings of exclusion or separation from the mainstream society. It is important to note that many struggle with post-migration difficulties for years after the initial migration phase is over and the multitude of adversities in the day to day life of migrants and refugees can have emotional, social, psychological and cultural implications (Colic-Piesker & Tilbury, 2003; Ben-Sira, 1997; Stack & Iwasaki, 2009).

The following section will discuss the differences between voluntary migrants and refugees or forced migrants. After which the literature on stress and coping in the post-migration context will be explored. The study will then be introduced with a discussion on the methodology, followed by the results and discussion section. The paper will conclude with a discussion on the potential implications of the interview data regarding the experiences of stress and perceived exclusion from mainstream Australian society by migrants and refugees.

It is important to engage in a brief discussion on the differences between immigrants and refugees. The difficulties experienced by both these groups during the resettlement process even though similar, there are distinct differences between those who migrate voluntarily and those who have little or no choice in the matter (Mamgain & Collins, 2003). The intentions and motivations for migration differ vastly between refugees and immigrants (Hsu, Davis & Hansen, 2004). A major distinguishing factor between the two groups is that immigrants or voluntary migrants have a choice of returning back to their country of origin whereas refugees or forced migrants, in general do not have that option (Hsu et al., 2004). Furthermore, typically refugees have to leave quickly meaning that they are largely unprepared for the journey ahead of them and this may further exacerbate their feelings of

having little to no control over their lives (Pernice & Brook, 1994). Whereas migrants may feel like they are gaining control over their lives through migration, refugees may feel like they are losing control of their future (Hsu et al., 2004).

Due to these differences the post-migration experiences of migrants and refugees can vary and the impact of post-migration stresses may also affect the two groups differently. Before furthering the discussion on post-migration stress it is important to understand the concept of stress and coping as defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This will be the focus of discussion in the next section.

### **Stress and Coping**

In a broad sense, stress can be viewed as a reaction to any major life event which is perceived by an individual to be negative (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Singer & Davidson, 1991; Yakushko, Watson & Thompson, 2008). However, the literature emphasises that there are multiple and varying definitions of stress and the experience of stress is highly subjective in nature (Yakushko et al., 2008; Sommerfield & McCrae, 2000; Selye 1991; Singer & Davidson, 1991). Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) developed the most popular model of psychological stress and coping. According to the authors, stress is defined as ‘a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being’ (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19).

This stress and coping model by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) take into account the relationship between the characteristics of a person’s personality and the particular environmental circumstances. The individual must appraise an environmental stimulus as negative, for the experience to be termed psychologically stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A situation or an event which is perceived as stressful is examined through the process of cognitive appraisal, which is a key concept in the stress and coping model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008).

Cognitive appraisal involves ‘categorising an event and its various facets with respect to its significance to well-being’ (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 31). Therefore, meaning that through this process an individual evaluates why and to what extent a particular event or a

series of events is stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are two forms of appraisals involved in the cognitive appraisal process: primary and secondary appraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1991). If a person is believed to be at risk of loss or being harmed, or if they feel threatened or challenged in any way then that event may be primarily appraised as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Consequently, a secondary appraisal becomes important to be able to manage the situation (Lazarus and Folkman 1984; Folkman & Lazarus 1988). During secondary appraisal the individual enquires what can be done, or what coping options are at their disposal, the subsequent answers then influence the coping strategies to be employed (Folkman & Lazarus 1988).

An individual has the choice of engaging in one of two forms of coping strategies following secondary appraisal: problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If an encountered stressful situation can either be changed or managed then problem-focused coping strategy is engaged with (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Folkman, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993). However, if one is faced with a challenging or harmful situation and deems it to be unchangeable, then emotion-focused coping is used to regulate distress (Folkman, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1993). The main purpose of emotion-focused coping is to minimise emotional distress by changing values, attitudes and / or by shifting perspectives (Gazinour, Richter & Eiseman, 2004).

Specifically, when discussing migrants and refugees encountering stress in the post-migration context and being able to effectively cope with those stresses, those who relocate to culturally different societies may experience stresses that are different to those who relocate to culturally similar societies (Ryan et al., 2008) and this may impact on one's ability to cope effectively. Migrants and refugees face a myriad of stresses upon resettlement in a new country and while acknowledging the complexities of stress reactions, for the purposes of simplicity and clarity, the paper will focus on post-migration stress in the context of acculturative stress.

### **Acculturative Stress**

The most widely accepted definition of acculturation refers to "...those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). However, Rudmin (2009) has argued that this definition of acculturation does not consider the possibility of one individual acculturating independent of his or her culture. Therefore, it is now recognised that acculturation not only occurs at a group level but also at an individual level, termed psychological acculturation (Graves, 1967; Berry, 2005). And cultural acculturation describes the changes that occur at a group level when continuous first-hand contact occurs between two groups (Berry, 2005).

Psychological acculturation involves various changes that an individual experiences which can include shifts in values, attitudes, behaviours, abilities and motives (Berry, 1992; Matsudaira, 2006). These changes can be changes lifestyle preferences such as ways of eating, speaking or dressing (Berry, 1992; Berry, 2005). During cultural acculturation the acculturating group may experience physical changes such as, a new place to live, new types of housing, increased population density, etc (Berry, 1992). Other changes to consider are biological changes which can include changed diet and nutrition (Berry, 1992). Acculturation also results in social changes, both within one's own culture and in between differing cultures (Berry, 1992; Matsudaira, 2006). A noteworthy point to consider is that both psychological and cultural acculturation are long-term processes with some changes taking years or even generations to take place (Berry, 2005).

Two individual processes are outlined in Berry's acculturation framework: the maintenance of the original culture and the development of relationships with the new culture (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 1995; Thompson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). Four acculturative strategies are embedded in these two processes which help explain the variations in the ways that people engage in the acculturation process (Berry, 2005).

The four strategies of acculturation are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation (Berry, 1992). Integration describes the desire to maintain one's values and behaviours from culture of origin whilst adopting the values and beliefs of the new culture (Berry, 2005; Berry, 1992; Thompson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). This strategy is argued to be the best approach and to have the most positive impact on social cohesion (Berry, 1997). However, Berry emphasises that in order for migrants and refugees to successfully integrate

into the new society, the host society needs to be open and inclusive in its willingness for cultural diversity, therefore this implying that this is a two-way process (Berry, 1997)

Assimilation refers to the complete relinquishing of one's own cultural identity and wholeheartedly adopting the beliefs, values and behaviours of the new culture (Berry, 2005; Berry, 1992; Thompson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). Separation applies to those who wholly embrace their culture of origin and reject the new culture (Berry, 2005; Berry, 1992; Thompson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). Finally, marginalisation implies that individuals or groups are unable to identify with either their own culture of origin or with the host society (Berry, 2005; Berry, 1992; Thompson & Hoffman-Goetz, 2009). This final strategy in particular can lead to feeling of loss of identity and alienation (Berry, 1992).

The various changes that migrants and refugees encounter during resettlement can be the cause of considerable stress which can negatively affect physical, social and psychological aspects of health (Vega, Kolody & Valle, 1987; Finch, Hummer, Kolody & Vega, 2001; Shinnar, 2008; Smart & Smart, 1995). The literature attributes much of this stress to the process of acculturation (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987). Acculturative stress is a particular type of stress which is rooted in the process of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 1995; Berry, Minde & Mok, 1987; Sam & Berry, 2010; Berry, 2006; Berry, 1992; Kopic, 2004; Crockett, Iturbide, Stone, McGinley, Raffaelli & Carlo, 2007). Past research has reported on migrants and refugees engaging in harmful or detrimental behaviours, suffering from depressive symptoms and losing social networks due to migration (Vega et al., 1987; Finch et al., 2001; Smart & Smart, 1995).

As argued by Sam and Berry (2010), acculturation can be compared to a set of major life events as it can present an individual with many challenges, such as, encountering discrimination, finding employment, negotiating cultural differences, among many others (Murray, 2010). An individual is particularly vulnerable if he or she is lacking in adequate social supports or strategies to cope with the events they are faced with (Sam & Berry, 2010). The underlying idea is that if the difficulties are appraised as being troublesome due to an inability to effectively manage them through behavioural changes, then this results in acculturative stress (Sam & Berry, 2010). However, in keeping with the stress and coping model acculturation is perceived and interpreted in different way by different people, meaning acculturation does not have to result in acculturative stress (Sam & Berry, 2010).

The following section will discuss the post-migration stressors of perceived discrimination, media representation of migrants and refugees, lack of language fluency and cultural differences experienced by migrants and refugees upon migration to a new social and cultural environment.

### **Post-Migration Stress**

It has been argued that the migration process in general can be considered to be stressful. All migrants, whether they migrate due to personal choice or have little control over the matter encounter many challenges in a new country that can impact on their quality of life (Stack & Iwasaki, 2009). Additionally, migrants who relocate to culturally different societies may experience stresses that are different to those who relocate to culturally similar societies (Ryan et al., 2008). Below is a discussion on the stressful post-migration experiences of: 1) perceived discrimination, exclusion and prejudice, 2) negative representations in the media, and 3) lack of English language proficiency and cultural differences. All stressors stemming from these aspects can lead to feelings of exclusion in many different ways in the host country, as the following sections further explain.

#### Perceived Discrimination and Prejudice

The relationship between acculturation and perceived discrimination is an extensively researched area, and the collective consensus in the literature is that perceived discrimination is a major acculturative stressor (Lindert, Kozilius, Van de Vijver, Kroon & Arends-Toth, 2008; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk & Schmitz, 2003; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, Solheim, 2004). In general, research argues that there are 'clear negative relationships between perceived ethnic discrimination and well-being of immigrants' (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind & Perhoniemi, 2006, p. 268). The stressful experiences of migrants and refugees in a new country can be compounded by incidents of perceived discrimination and / or racism (Fuller 1993; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2000).

Ethnic discrimination can be described as being the recipient of biased treatment due to one's ethnicity and ethnicity pertains to the way individuals are generally grouped due to notions of culture of origin and race (Contrada, Ashmore, Gary, Coups, Egeth, Sewell, Ewell, Goyal &



Chasse, 2000; Contrada, Ashmore, Gary, Coups, Egeth, Sewell, Ewell & Goyal, 2001). Racism and racial discrimination can be communicated in various ways, including through behaviours and practices that involve unfair treatment or inaccurate stereotypes, harbouring negative beliefs or by having emotions of hatred or fear (Dion, 2002; Priest, Paradies, Trenerry, Karlsen & Kelly, 2012). The variety of racial discrimination can differ from openly expressing insults and threats including physical violence, to those that are deeply entrenched in social systems and structures (Priest et al., 2012). Ethnic discrimination or racism can involve exclusion, stigmatization, social distancing, harassment, violence and other acts (Brondolo, Kelly, Coakley, Gordon, Thompson, Cassellis, Tobin, Sweeney & Contrada, 2005).

Specifically speaking on the concept of exclusion, this is in reference to the many dimensions of deprivation which reduce migrant individuals, families and community's capabilities to partake in key aspects of the host society (Correa-Valez et al., 2010; Fangen, 2010). The processes that contribute to and generate exclusion can be wide ranging, including 'structural, institutional, cultural, economic and other barriers to participation' (Dorsner, 2004, p. 381). Research on social exclusion reports that during social interactions various forms of exclusion can be displayed in subtle ways (Fangen, 2010). These types of exclusion take on indirect forms which are conveyed through the ways one relates or does not relate to the other or in the subtle ways of talking with and watching the other (Fangen, 2010). Correa-Valez and his colleagues (2010) have reported that for youth from refugee backgrounds, experiences of social exclusion significantly impacts on subjective wellbeing.

Whereas discrimination describes racist behaviours and practices, prejudice refers to attitudes and emotions which are based on racism (Berman & Paradies, 2008; Dion, 2002). Therefore, prejudice can be thought of as 'an antipathetic attitude towards outgroups and their members' (Kessler, Mummendey, Funke, Brown, Binder, Zagefka, Leyens, Demoulin & Maqil, 2010, p. 987). Both experiences of prejudice and racial discrimination can be unintentional, subtle and even unconscious (Priest et al., 2012). Majority of immigrants migrate in the search of a better life, however the reality many experience include isolation, cultural hostilities or structural or political problems, all of which contribute to lower levels of trust and negatively impact on their sense of belonging (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne & Solomos, 2007; Fangen, 2010) and therefore reinforce perceived exclusion.

Discrimination can negatively affect health and well-being by being a contributing factor to the uptake of unhealthy behaviours such as alcohol consumption and smoking (Williams, Neighbours & Jackson, 2003). These behaviours can become a way of coping or result from reduced self-regulation when discrimination creates barriers to accessing housing, education or employment, these can further contribute to troublesome or even criminal behaviour (Williams et al., 2003; Pittaway, Muli & Shteir, 2009; Casimiro et al., 2007; Priest et al., 2012; Paradies 2006; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Okazaki, 2009).

### Negative Media Representation of Migrants and Refugees

Frequently immigrants and their issues are negatively represented in the media (Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil & Baker, 2008; Steimel, 2010; Pickering, 2001). Migrants are mostly presented as threats to the host nation (Leudar et al., 2008; Steimel, 2010; Pickering, 2001). Refugees and asylum seekers in particular, are portrayed and constructed as not only a population that is significantly problematic in Australia and elsewhere, but one that is a 'deviant' problem (Pickering, 2001, p. 169; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Cisneros, 2008). The use of language and choice of vocabulary with which refugees and asylum seekers are described, such as 'bogus', 'queue jumpers' or 'boat people' can be considered to be potentially marginalising this group (Pickering, 2001; O'Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007).

Negative media reports on immigrants in the host country taint public perceptions of this group, not only as a whole and but also by placing emphasis on certain ethnic or religious groups, which can hinder resettlement efforts (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson 2012; Casimiro et al., 2007). In majority cases the Australian media portray Muslims and those of Arab origin, and their causes primarily in a negative manner (Casimiro et al., 2007; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Celermajer, 2007; Aly, 2007). Increasingly, Australian media represents Muslims as outsiders who threaten the values and standards of a modern, liberal and democratic society (Celermajer, 2007). Depicting Muslims as 'fanatical, uncompromising, war-mongering, irrational people who engage in terrorism' (Brasted, 2001, as cited in Casimiro et al., 2007) ignore the diversity of practices and views among the Muslim community and create misconceptions about this group in Australia (Casimiro et al., 2007).

The misrepresentations of the Muslim population in the media influence negative public opinion which can then adversely impact on the lived experiences of Muslims in the mainstream Australian society (Aly, 2007; Casimiro et al., 2007). Muslim women in

particular are vulnerable and frequent victims of discrimination and racism due to their observance of traditional Islamic dress or hijab which renders them easy targets for racial abuse (Casimiro et al., 2007; Mansouri & Kamp, 2007). Muslim women in the study by Casimiro and her colleagues (2007, p. 64) reported to feeling ‘alienated’, ‘isolated’ or ‘vulnerable’ due to their life situations in Australia because many encountered negative attitudes from mainstream society and reported to feeling fear regarding their personal safety. Young Muslim men have also reported to feeling vilified by the media and being targeted by the police due to their cultural background (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007).

Generally speaking, for migrant and refugee communities, feeling a lack of acceptance from the host community can not only result in feelings of loneliness and isolation, but demonising those from certain ethnic or cultural backgrounds can have wider problematic repercussions when receiving assistance from schools, police banks, for example (Pittaway et al., 2009). Additionally, the other consequence of being marginalised is that many internalise the discriminatory or racist attitudes that is received and believe them to be true which further perpetuates the sense of isolation and marginalisation (Pittaway et al., 2009). This may create a fear of authority which can become a major barrier to accessing and contacting appropriate services and facilities which can thwart successful integration and resettlement efforts (Pittaway et al., 2009).

#### Lack of Language Proficiency and Cultural Differences

Apart from the stress of being a recipient of perceived discrimination and media misrepresentations, lack of English language proficiency and unfamiliarity with the host country culture can make the resettlement process difficult (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012; Casimiro et al., 2007; Kotic, 2004; Beiser & Hou, 2006; Crockett et al., 2007; Shakesphere-Finch & Wickham, 2009; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel & Lacherez, 2006; Murray, Davidson & Schweitzer, 2010; Stack & Iwasaki, 2009; Pumariega, Rothe & Pumariega, 2005; Kirmayer, Narasiah, Munoz, Rashid, Ryder, Guzdar, Hassan, Rousseau & Pottie, 2011) and reinforce feelings of perceived exclusion or separation.

Difficulties in gaining employment have been attributed to both a lack of language proficiency as well as racial discrimination (Shakesphere-Finch & Wickham, 2009; Batalova & Fix, 2010; Casimiro et al., 2007; Bouma & Brace-Govan, 2000). This becomes a significant barrier to developing social networks through employment or other social activities and creates dependency for those who are already isolated (Casimiro et al., 2007;

Kim, Worley, Allen, Vinson, Crowther, Parmelee & Chiriboga, 2011). Research demonstrates that immigrant women who lack English language proficiency are more likely to be unemployed and spend time predominantly at home taking care of young children, compared to those who have English language proficiency (Batalova & Fix, 2010). The imposed isolation may lead to feelings of lack of belonging as it further limits women's opportunities to improve and practice English language skills (Casimiro et al., 2007; Batalova & Fix, 2010).

Issues with acquiring language proficiency and experiencing difficulties with the Australian culture may be more pronounced for those whose cultures are significantly different from the mainstream Australian culture. Many times, other than the English language, Muslims have difficulties with a range of aspects in the Australian culture, including drinking, sexual liberalism, family breakdown, swearing and prejudice (Casimiro et al., 2007). Particularly, Muslim women can feel 'isolated, unable to deal with the strange language and strange ways of Australia' (Bouma & Brace-Govan, 2000, p. 163). For many Muslim women religious and cultural factors can impinge upon their desire or decision to not attend English classes (Rida & Milton, 2001). Many women in the study by Rida and Milton (2001) reported that attending mixed sex English classes would result in feelings of discomfort and others were deterred from accessing English classes due to spouses and / or peer's discouragement.

Linguistic disparities disadvantage those immigrants who are the most vulnerable, further example are elderly immigrants whose English may be particularly limited (Kim et al., 2011). Experiences of difficulties with spoken and / or written English can reduce health service use which can result in increased psychological distress and poor health (Kim et al., 2011).

Additionally, for those immigrants who may be quite proficient in the English language, intercultural communication may pose certain misunderstandings (Ko, 2008). When etiquettes, rules and manners differ between cultures, these may become barriers which hinder communication or understanding rather than facilitate them (Ko, 2008). These differences in cultural ways of communicating may lead to the perception of exclusion by some migrants and refugees.

Immigrant and refugees are faced with a myriad of resettlement challenges and potential stressors which can lead to a perception of exclusion and negatively impact on well-being in various life domains. The level of stress experienced by individuals depends on many factors such as age, gender, education, marital status and length of settlement (Yakushko et al., 2008).

Additionally, personality characteristics and other factors such as coping strategies also need to be taken into account. The focus of the next section will be on coping strategies employed by migrants and refugees in the face of post-migration challenges and feelings of exclusion.

### **Post-Migration Coping Strategies**

Coping has been described as a process that requires both cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage external or internal demands that are perceived as strenuous or beyond the resources of the individual (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Strategies refer to *doing*; it involves the actions that people employ after encountering a stressful situation (Gazinour, Richter & Eiseman 2004). According to literature, religious coping and social support are two of the major forms of coping strategies used by migrants and refugees. The next section will discuss the importance of religious coping and social support.

#### Religious Coping

Religious and / or spiritual coping involves those strategies which are grounded in spiritual or religious beliefs (Lee & Chan, 2009). Practicing these beliefs provide support, consolation and a sense of optimism, all of which help to cope with and understand the everyday stresses that people experience (Lee & Chan, 2009). Past studies have demonstrated that religious coping is positively associated with alleviating stress in many different situations, including for those suffering from chronic illnesses like cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV / AIDS, and also for trauma survivors who have substance abuse or mental health issues, along with those who have perceived stress (Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari & Pargament, 2001; Nairn & Merluzzi, 2003; Keefe, Affleck, Lefebvre, Underwood, Caldwell, Drew, Egert, Gibson & Pargament, 2001; Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002; Fallot & Heckman, 2005; Lee, 2007).

However, some research also indicates that religious coping can become harmful if it leads to the questioning or challenging of beliefs which can cause distress (Thune-Boyle, Stygall, Keshtgar & Newman 2006).

In regards to literature which focuses on the effects of religious coping on the immigrant population, according to the findings spirituality and religion can be influential in providing effective strategies to cope with difficulties (Lee & Chan, 2009). Reading religious texts, having a belief in God, and participating in prayer have all been cited as essential to managing sadness and repossessing meaning and lost control in life (Halcon, Robertson,

Savik, Johnson, Spring, Butcher, Westermeyer & Jaranson, 2004; Schweitzer, Greenslade & Kagee, 2007; Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012).

Although, religious coping and spirituality has emerged as being important, social coping is the other salient strategy that is used by migrants and refugees to manage their post-migration stress. Associating with others whether from the same ethnic community or the wider mainstream community facilitates understanding and integration efforts through participation in religious gatherings in churches and mosques, as well as in sporting events (Pittaway et al., 2009). Accordingly, the discussion below attempts to further elaborate on social coping strategies.

### Social Coping

According to research, social coping is a prominent coping strategy which increases and maintains the well-being of migrants and refugees in the post-migration context (Miller et al., 2002; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Pittaway et al., 2009; McMichael & Manderson 2004; Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson 2012; Crockett et al., 2007; Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Colic-Piesker & Tilbury 2003; Colic-Piesker, 2009; Pumariaga et al., 2005; Brough et al., 2003; Hsu et al., 2004; Beiser & Hou, 2001). Overall, seeking social support has been thought of as an effective coping strategy which correlates with lower PTSD levels (Huijts, Kleijn, van Emmerick, Noordof & Smith, 2012; Ahern, Galea, Fernandez, Koci, Waldman & Vlahov 2004; Ozer, Best, Lipsey & Weiss, 2008). In contrast, having inadequate social support can be a factor which contributes to high levels of resettlement stress which has a positive correlation with anxiety symptoms, depression and PTSD.

Importantly, receiving support from one's own ethnic community members in the adopted country has been identified as being central to successful resettlement (Pittaway et al., 2009). This support is imperative to receiving and providing understanding which occurs through information exchange with those who are in similar situations (Schweitzer et al., 2007; Pittaway et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that finding comfort by associating with members of the same community may not be part of everyone's experience (Schweitzer et al., 2007).

In many instances these interactions can lead to competition, jealousy or egotism and the discussion of similar accounts may evoke distressing past memories (Miller et al., 2002; McMichael & Manderson 2004). Many participants in a study by Schweitzer and his

colleagues (2007) recounted feeling constrained due to the pressure of having to adhere to traditional Sudanese cultural values and norms. Many of these participants conveyed a preference to form friendships with non-Sudanese Australian for informational and emotional support (Schweitzer et al., 2007).

In conclusion, migrants and refugees face a myriad of potential stressors that can impose a sense of perceived exclusion from the host country, and negatively affect their lives. These feelings may not only develop during the initial resettlement period but may persist even decades after migration, distorting their perceptions of social cohesion or hindering their ability to integrate into the host society. Even with the various coping strategies that are utilised, coping can only be productive if it builds and maintains resilience in the long-term (Goodman, 2004). Otherwise what is viewed as effective in the present prove to be problematic or non-adaptive in the long-term (Goodman, 2004). Therefore it is important to hear the stories of migrants and refugees to gain a deeper appreciation of their trials and tribulations upon migration from their perspectives.

## **Method**

### Participants

Purposive sampling was chosen for this study which included the snowball method and organisational recruitment. All participants were recruited from a medical clinic in Melbourne. Permission was obtained from the owner of the clinic in order to advertise for participant recruitment at the clinic. After written permission was received, several advertisements of the current research were placed at various locations around the reception area and waiting room of the medical clinic. However, most participants took part in the semi-structured interviews upon recommendation from their GP's at the clinic.

The inclusion criteria stated that participants had to have been living in Australia for a minimum of six months and that they had to be 18 years of age and above. Otherwise, migrants and refugees from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds were invited to take part in the interviews provided they felt enough confidence in their ability to speak English to

provide insight into their lives in Australia. Nonetheless, some participants struggled to provide further explanations at certain points during the interviews.

A total of forty participants were interviewed over a two month period. The participants consisted of 25 men and 15 women. The country of origin for most participants were India (14), Afghanistan (9), and Pakistan (6) others were from Cambodia, (3), China (2), Mauritius (2), Egypt (1), Sri Lanka (1), Zimbabwe (1) and Phillipines (1). 30 participants identified arriving as a migrant and 10 participants identified as being a refugee and age of participants ranged from 23 to 63 ( $M = 36.15$ years,  $SD = 1.34$ ).

The duration of residence in Australia for participants ranged from 9 months to 32 years ( $M = 9.5$ years,  $SD = 5.9$ ). Majority of the participants identified themselves as Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or Christian, although this was not a required category for participants to indicate, therefore religious proclivities of some participants are unknown. Most participants were employed in some capacity (29); others identified themselves as students (4) or as unemployed or on the pension (7).

### Materials and Procedure

Upon recruitment, each participant took part in a semi-structured interview, the duration of which ranged from about 10 minutes to almost 2 hours, although the average interview length was \_\_\_\_\_. This variation in interview duration accounts for linguistic disparities among participants as well as perceptions of degree of stress experienced in Australia. A list of open-ended questions was posed from an interview guide and during the interview additional questions were asked depending on participant responses. This method was chosen as it allowed the interviewer to delve into and deeply explore individual's personal and social experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006). In addition, semi-structured interviews are an effective method in qualitative research as in defines the specific areas which are to be explored (Britten 1995).

Interviews were opened with the invitation: can you please tell me about your resettlement experiences in Australia so far? A broad open-ended question like this one lead to the uncovering of information in a systematic manner, which included experiences of perceived post-migration stress including discrimination, acculturative stress, impact on well-being, and the coping strategies used to manage the stressful experiences. Accordingly, follow-up



questions and probes were used to help participants expand on their answers and where appropriate, provide examples. All interviews were audiotaped with written and verbal consent acquired prior to commencement of interviews and upon completion of interviews each participant was reimbursed with a \$20 Coles / Myer gift card for their time.

### Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data in order to establish meanings. One of the advantages of thematic analysis is that it provides flexibility to identify, analyse and report on certain themes that occur in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To carry out a thematic analysis of the data an open-coding was used to help identify the overarching patterns and themes that were emerging from the interview transcripts (Sarantakos 1998). In addition, applying open coding helped to develop broad categories by comparing and conceptualising the data. This was followed by the use of axial coding. Axial coding was helpful in organising the open codes and making connections between the categories (Sarantakos 1998). Subsequently all categories were grouped into themes and sub themes, all the while ensuring that the integrity of the original data was maintained. The use of NVivo facilitated the data analysis stage by aiding the process locating and retrieving relevant segments of the interviews for analysis.

## **Results and Discussion**

Data were thematically analysed within two broad areas for exploration: post-migration stress and coping strategies. The three themes that have been identified as stemming from participants stressful experiences during post-migration relate to those occurrences that have resulted in a sense of perceived exclusion for participants living in Australia. These themes pertain to experiences of perceived discrimination and prejudice, media misrepresentations and lack of language fluency and cultural differences. Two of the major coping strategies to have emerged from the interview transcriptions are in alignment with past research, religious coping and social support. The range of stressors that migrant and refugee participants experience in the post-migration context, which may challenge their sense of belonging in Australia, lead the discussion in the next section.

### **1.0 Post-Migration Stress**

The description of stress provided by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasises the individual's judgement in determining whether an incident is stressful. In the current study the discussion on resettlement stress is embedded within the concept of acculturative stress. The notion of acculturative stress refers to any forms of stress which originate from the process of acculturation (Berry, Minde & Mok 1987). In this paper, the discussion on post-migration stress has focused on those difficulties that might lead to migrants and refugees perceiving themselves as excluded from mainstream society. Accordingly, the results presented in this section will emphasise these perceptions. The discussion begins with perceived subtle discrimination and prejudice which includes the notion of exclusion (Brondolo et al., 2005).

### 1.1 'It's Not like Harsh Racism but It Is Definitely'.

Subtle discrimination refers to the forms of discrimination that are less visible, not easily identifiable and which may even be unintentional (Rowe, 1990; Laer & Janssens, 2011). Nonetheless, the consequences of being the recipient of subtle discrimination and / or prejudice can be dire (Rowe, 1990; Laer & Jansson, 2011). As blatant forms of discrimination and racism become less socially acceptable, less overt forms of everyday discrimination are emerging to become more common (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief & Bradley, 2003). Many scholars argue that subtle forms of discrimination and racism are entrenched in the everyday interactions that take place in the workplace, the effects of which can be detrimental (Deitch et al., 2003, Ogbonna & Harris, 2006; Cortina, 2008; Laer & Janssens, 2011). In the study by Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Ditlemann and Lagunes (2010, p. 63) focusing on Latinos in America, it was reported that in relation to racial discrimination 'slight but consistent disparities in treatment can have a cumulative negative effect' which can lead to perceived exclusion.

Many participants in the current study have reported to have experienced subtle discrimination in different ways at their current or previous workplaces, and they all attributed it to their ethnicity and immigrant status. Some participants have made general statements about noticing differential treatment compared to their colleagues who are Anglo-Australian.

...we are three, four, immigrants working in my company and we always found that we face different work culture compared to Australians, it's not like harsh racism but it is definitely. (Raj, 31).

‘...being non-Australian they [employers] treat us differently...’ (Anil, 44)

Other participants spoke about their views that those who have been living in Australia for generations feel threatened by migrants and therefore group together to maintain status quo.

...particularly the European people who living in here for generations, they worry about new migrants...coming in here and take their job and they try to protect their own space so they have ... [an] unofficial club...I wouldn't call it an Anglo club but I can feel about it you know...they will form a...small group then they will tie together...when they come together they pretty much weaken all the new migrants. (Fang, 45)

This same participant went onto say that ‘when you start to work it's very hard because the local culture people, their culture is to look after themselves ... they will not say hey do you need any help...’. Accordingly, Deitch and her colleagues (2003) have argued that in the age of subtle forms of discrimination or ‘modern racism’ people fail to view themselves as racist and therefore the use of blatant expressions of discrimination are rare. However, people do engage in invisible forms of discriminatory behaviours, which include avoidance, unfriendly or closed nonverbal and verbal communication, and failure to provide support or assistance (Deitch et al., 2003).

Aside from the workplace, participants have also reported on feeling excluded in the wider community in their everyday lives. One participant spoke about having a friendly neighbour whose ‘...wife has never spoken to us, so we feel resistance around her...’ (Raj, 31). He further went on to say ‘...the guy talk to so I've sometimes thought of calling him for a couple of drink, dinner or something but the wife never talks, she like never even [has made] eye contact...’. This sentiment by Raj echoes those that have been made by other participants who have a desire to build friendships with mainstream community, however as reported by past research don't always feel ‘welcome’ (Pittaway et al., 2009, p. 141).

Similarly, Afsana (25), who is from Afghanistan and wears a hijab expressed that at ‘...high school I tried to be included in groups I really felt like deeply that I am not part of the group and that affected me a lot because every day I faced the challenge...’. Afsana’s perception of not feeling like part of the in-group at school could be attributed to the attitudes and behaviours of other students, which whether intentional or unintentional can feed feelings of exclusion and separation (Fangen, 2010). At times, perceptions of exclusion or inability to create a socially inclusive environment may be rooted in the defined social rituals of the majority population in which young people from certain ethnic backgrounds cannot participate (Fangen 2010). As an example, many young Muslims avoid alcohol due to the teachings of their religion; these types of differences can sometimes lead to perceived or actual exclusion (Fangen, 2010). Differential cultural practices can be significantly challenging, as cultural clashes can create barriers to inclusion or feelings of inclusion (Pittaway et al., 2009). Specifically, Casimiro and her colleagues (2007, p. 58) have argued that ‘Muslim refugees have significant resettlement needs over and above those of other migrants’ and Muslim women are particularly stressed and strained.

The exposure to everyday racism in all its subtle forms and the subsequent feelings of exclusion, whether in the wider community or in the workplace is of particular concern because it can negatively impact on various domains of wellbeing (Deitch et al., 2003; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006,). Similarly, negative media portrayals of migrants and refugees and their causes can also contribute to the sense of exclusion and adversely affect wellbeing.

### 1.2 ‘Media Portrays Really Bad Image...’

Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson (2012) have suggested that negative media portrayals of refugees can lead to hostilities towards immigrants in the community as media inevitable shapes public opinion and attitudes towards this population (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012). Accordingly, few participants in the present study reported of having been affected by media misrepresentations in direct and indirect ways. One participant stated that upon hearing she is from Afghanistan, people at her workplace or in the wider community make ill received “jokes” or ask her unwanted questions and she attributes these to the information fed by the media.

...because most people that don’t know a lot about Afghanistan, the only they see [is] on the news, they see only the fighting and the killing and all the bad thing which is fair

enough because if I don't know a lot about the country whatever the media shows I will say this is exactly what is...(Fatima, 23)

Afsana (25) too felt that the media plays a significant role in forming people's opinions and contributes to the negative attitudes towards migrants.

...media is the biggest [sic] of portraying what a refugee is umm sometimes if they try to convey their message in a positive way then obviously people can get in a positive way but I think majority of times they portraying the image of umm migrants in a negative way...

Specifically, Afsana spoke about being affected by negative media portrayals of the Muslim community. She felt that 'particularly like being a Muslim umm media portrays really bad image of Muslim as a whole...recently there has been protest of being religious...'. She further implied that according to her perceptions, she feels that the mainstream community hold the view that to 'live within the society...your religion should change because you are living in a different society...'. Research indicates that negative media treatment of Muslims promote Islamophobia and (mis)guides the opposition of causes that relate to the Muslim community, such as building of mosques (Dunn, Klocker & Salaby, 2007).

Other participants also from the Muslim community commented on feeling 'scared' or 'worried' about the misinformation that media disseminates and the consequences of this on their personal lives. Farid (42) worried about what his neighbour might be 'thinking about me you know with all this in the media and what would the people of the streets be thinking about me reading all this in the news...'. Similarly, Casimiro and authors (2007), described that Muslim refugee women in their study reported that the negative attitudes they encountered from Australians, attributed to negative media portrayals, left them feeling insecure or and concerned for their personal safety.

The above participant comments demonstrate the powerful role media plays in constructing migrants and refugees' feelings of not belonging in Australia or of being the Other. This is either due to the way migrant and refugee stories are portrayed in the media and / or because of the way it influences public opinions and attitudes, which then impacts on the everyday lived experiences of these groups, mostly negatively. The final section on post-migration

stresses will discuss those that stem from a lack of language proficiency and cultural differences which can result in perceived exclusion.

### 1.3 ‘I Can’t Speak English Good’ and ‘Australian Culture I Will Say...’

A difficulty with the English language is one of the main factors along with financial constraints and discrimination which pose significant challenges to successful resettlement and wellbeing (Beiser & Hou, 2006). Even though the Australian government provides English language classes for migrants and refugees, acquiring language fluency can be difficult for a variety of reasons. Those who have limited literacy skills or those who are minimally educated can find it especially difficult to learn English (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012). Particularly, these challenges can impact on those who are older and / or come from traditional backgrounds, for them adapting and succeeding in a literate and modern society pose immense difficulties (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012). Afsana (25) from Afghanistan stated that in general her parent’s generation are not particularly well educated and therefore the language problems persist for them.

...when we first came me and my family had a lot of issue[s] communicating with people outside our home and communicating in society with other and school...so that was the biggest challenges [sic] that we had and we still have it like my parent still doesn’t [sic] fully speak English...

Similarly another participant, Raj (31), said ‘communication problems is for some of my friend’s parents as well as my parents’. The lack of language proficiency is particularly problematic because it prevents integration efforts in many ways and has psychological and emotional consequences (Casimiro et al., 2007). Many participants recounted that their inability to speak English fluently lead to self-directed frustration and anger. Abram (63) said ‘...because I can’t speak English good...maybe I am a little angry...’. Research suggests that language proficiency has a significant impact on the mental health and employability of men (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Language is a significant barrier to employability (Beiser & Hou, 2006). Those participants who felt that they had limited grasp of the English language also felt that ‘...finding a job is hard because of communication’ (Akara, 34).

Along with attempting to acquire English language fluency, migrants and refugees experience difficulty in trying to adjust to a new culture and this may be the cause of some degree of distress (Kosic, 2004). Many participants commented on their home country being more social than Australia and felt the cultural differences of coming from a collectivist society to an individualistic one profoundly.

...China has a lot of history, we are a strong culture, Australian culture I will say...our culture is collective, it's a collective type of community and here is more individualistic, so that's basically the opposite... (Fang, 45)

...here the people everyone alone, alone. Now in my street when my house [sic]...all the people everyone don't say hello, different in my country... (Abram, 63)

...it's not like in India you know ahh it's a bit different...in India everyone comes and then talks to whom [ever]...and then get to know each other and then they maintain a good relationship... (Vishal, 35)

The above responses from migrant and refugee participants in the current study indicate a sense of isolation or loneliness that may result upon migration into a new country with a different culture. Pumariega and his co-authors (2005) have suggested that immigrants, particularly those who are older face great challenges during cultural transition. Immigration forces individuals, at least to some degree, to make lifestyle changes and shift traditional values, all of which can be isolating especially if other factors such as language barriers are present (Pumariega et al., 2005). The perceived cultural differences can lead to feelings of exclusion, indicated by Farid's (42) comment of '...you get that feeling that ok I am a little different...'.

Even though in the present study migrant and refugee participants experienced a myriad of stresses upon resettlement in Australia, which ranged from perceived discrimination, to media misrepresentations, linguistic barriers and cultural differences. Nonetheless, participants have also indicated that they employ various coping strategies to manage their post-migration difficulties. The most commonly mentioned coping strategies emerged to be receiving social support and religious coping. The following discussion begins with social coping methods.

## 2.0 Coping Strategies

### 2.1 'Having These Friends That's a Great Help'

All participants in the current study engaged in some sort of socialisation whether it was with their own ethnic community or with other migrants and refugees in general or with the wider mainstream community. Social supports from various sources work to provide different types and different levels of support (Crockett et al., 2007). Research suggests that social support may cushion the negative effects of stress either by preventing an event or a situation from being evaluated as stressful or by providing solutions to problems deemed stressful (Crockett et al., 2007). Accordingly, participants in the present study spoke about the importance of social support and the multiple sources of this type of support. Socialising with others from the same ethnic community is of particular importance as it provides familiarity and understanding from others who are in the same situation (Pittaway et al., 2009). This is indicated from Farid's (42) comment:

...having this community it's like a family, having these friends that's a great help and...the community we belong to as I said you know we are persecuted in Pakistan, we are called Ahmadiyya Muslims, so I belong to the Ahmadiyya community...and we are very close knit...

Others have reported on building social networks with other migrants and refugees from various ethnicities and cultures as significant to providing social support in similar ways to associating with others from the same community. The main benefit reported understood that one's experiences in a new country are universal.

...I am going to language school for 1 year [and this] has been helping me a lot because in there we had variety of different cultures students...we got the idea that yeah in Australia is a multicultural country...we had a lot of friends from our background but like building a connection the same time [as] learning a language was umm the biggest this that helped us resettle in here...talking to other people...you feel that...they are experience similar thing to you... (Afsana, 25)



Interestingly, as indicated by the above comment and also echoed by a few other participants, these interactions with other newly migrated individuals occur at English language classes, therefore an added benefit that many participants were surprised to have gained from attending language classes were the building of new friendships. The major supplier for English training courses in Australia are Adult Migration English Service (AMES) (Casimiro et al., 2007), which most migrants in the current study attended. However, research indicates that there are many who do not attend English classes due to various reasons ranging from inconveniences to problems with attending mixed gender classes (Casimiro et al., 2007). Usually the most vulnerable are left out due to an inability or refusal to attend classes, such as women, particularly Muslim women who have concerns regarding attending mixed male and female classes and those who are elderly are also affected (Casimiro et al., 2007; Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2012). As all experiences are interrelated, the problem in this lies in the perpetuation of feelings of isolation, loneliness or lack of belonging as the opportunities for socialising become limited (Casimiro et al., 2007).

## 2.2 Religious Coping

Social support and religious coping are closely related, this is reflected in the comment by Li (38) who said ‘...my husband I go to church very regularly ... and after ...[church] services they have some snack so we can sit at the table and chit chat and have some snack...’. Religious institutions like churches and mosques not only facilitate religious coping but are also central to social support as they contribute to lifting barriers between different cultures to promote unity and social cohesion (Pittaway et al., 2007). Attending religious gatherings seems to strengthen the emotional support that is received through social support as well. As indicated by Ahmed’s (46) statement of ‘...well I go to the...mosque so it’s taking stress off me ... when I go to the mosque I can ... talk to others[s] and we pray together...ask help from the God so...’.

Literature in the field has suggested that having a belief in God provides emotional support by helping to cope with feelings of sadness or loneliness (Schweitzer et al.,

2007). Other participants discussed that visiting their religious institutions helped to make them ‘...internally strong...and also brings [sic] some peace...’ (Vivek, 34). Additionally, material support is also provided by religious institutions (Schweitzer et al., 2007) as Vivek further recounted that when he first arrived in Australia he not only received ‘...some happiness...’ by visiting temples but also ‘...we get free food in some religious places yeah those are the good things which we expect in the early stages..’.

There were also few participants (9) who did not find any benefit from their religious practices and performed them simply as a ritualistic practice.

To me really I’ve been born and brought up in such an atmosphere that our parents have worship [sic] and I’m just doing it but I don’t think emotionally from heart I should not do it, I don’t find I’m doing from heart and getting healed from those practices (Anil, 44)

Some research indicates that religious coping may not be helpful for everyone as it can be insignificant or even harmful for some (Thune-Boyle et al., 2006). It has been reported that religious practicing can increase psychological distress for some individuals (Ben-Zur, Gilbar & Lev, 2001; Thune-Boyle et al., 2006). However, it seems to be of benefit for many.

### **Conclusion**

This paper presented the insights gained from interviews with those participants who are migrants and refugees in Australia, who belong to various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The interviews reveal that these two populations experience varying degrees of perceived exclusion from the mainstream Australian society, either due to language barriers, perceived discrimination, cultural differences or because of the way they are portrayed in the media. The main stressors experienced have been indicated to be experiences of perceived discrimination and prejudice, a major source of acculturative stress which encompasses the notion of exclusion (Lindert et al., 2008; Brondod et al., 2005).

Others include media portrayals of migrants and refugees and their causes in Australia also seem to cause considerable distress and challenge feelings of belonging. Negative media portrayals of particular migrant groups heighten fear and exacerbate the sense of exclusion and not belonging. Linguistic disparities with the host country and observed cultural differences are also high on the list of stressors experienced by these two populations. Lack of language fluency is particularly problematic as it becomes a barrier to employment and building of social networks which then negatively affect wellbeing and reinforce a sense of isolation (Colic-Piesker & Tilbury, 2003; Casimiro et al., 2007). Interestingly, it seems that feelings of lack of belonging are felt not only upon migration or during the first few months or years of resettlement, but persist for years or decades after migration.

This paper also suggests that migrants use the coping strategies of seeking social support and religious coping, which reaffirms findings from previous research (Lee & Chan, 2009; Miller et al., 2002; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Pittaway et al., 2009). For those who are religious, religious coping can be very powerful, but the coping strategy of seeking social support was found to be more universally used. Majority of the participants in the current study engaged in some form of social coping.

This research has provided understanding and insight into the everyday lived experiences and feelings of migrants and refugees in Australia. The information revealed has indicated that these groups are experiencing significant stressors and feelings of exclusion in the Australian society, which can undermine the possibilities for social and community cohesion both in the short-term and also in the future.

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