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# Integration of Afghan Refugee Professionals Into American Society

Khatera Bahrami  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Khatera Bahrami

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Abstract

Integration of Afghan Refugee Professionals Into American Society

by

Khatera Bahrami

PhD, Walden University, 2023

MS, Walden University, 2021

BS, George Mason University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

This study explored the social and psychological challenges Afghan refugee professionals experienced when they entered the U.S. workforce after being forcibly displaced.

Trauma, job loss, and cultural adjustment significantly impacted their mental health and reintegration. The study examined how social and psychological obstacles impacted their cultural adjustment, well-being, and capacity to deal with credentialing and professional demands. This research employed a qualitative phenomenological design, grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Stress Appraisal Model, using 60-minute audio-only, semi-structured interviews with 10 Afghan refugee professionals.

Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), according to the findings, participants faced challenges relating to language competency and credential recognition, widespread underemployment, emotional strain from trauma and acculturation, and loss of professional identity. Participants reported feeling alone and devalued, but they also showed resilience backed by cultural coping mechanisms, family, and the community. To better serve Afghan refugee professionals, these findings have implications for the need for formal credentialing processes and culturally sensitive mental health treatments.

Strengthening community-based initiatives that improve the integration and well-being of Afghan refugees, reducing underemployment, and expanding fair workforce access can all lead to positive social change. Helping Afghan refugees with their professional reconstruction and psychological well-being improves their quality of life, promotes safer communities, and aids in the prevention of violence.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of the Study .....	5
Knowledge Gap .....	10
Problem Statement .....	11
Purpose.....	13
Research Question .....	14
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Nature of the Study .....	15
Definitions.....	16
Assumptions.....	18
Scope and Delimitations .....	19
Limitations .....	20
Significance of the Study .....	23
Summary .....	24
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	26
Introduction.....	26
Literature Search Strategy.....	26
Theoretical Foundation .....	27

The Conservation Theory of Resources.....	27
Linking the Dissertation's Topic to Conservation of Resources Theory:	
Comprehending the Challenges Faced by Afghan Refugee	
Professionals in the United States.....	29
Model for Assessing Stress: Lazarus and Folkman (1984) .....	35
Important Elements of the Model for Stress Appraisal .....	36
Relationship Between the Dissertation and the Stress Appraisal Model .....	37
Literature Review.....	42
Refugees' Adjustment Psychologically.....	42
Social Integration and Resilience.....	50
Coping Strategies of Afghan Refugee Professionals .....	52
Resilience-Oriented Mental Health Interventions .....	52
Summary .....	53
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	55
Introduction.....	55
Research Design and Rationale .....	55
Research Tradition and Question.....	55
Reflexive Thematic Analysis Qualitative Research Rationale .....	58
Role of the Researcher .....	58
Research Design Improvement.....	61
Recruiting of Participants .....	62
Data Management and Analysis .....	63

Journaling and Reflexivity .....	64
Maintaining Ethical Integrity .....	64
Methodology .....	66
Participant Selection and Protocol .....	66
Sample.....	66
Instrumentation .....	67
For Researcher-Developed Instruments.....	68
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection .....	69
Recruitment of Participants.....	71
Platforms for Employment.....	71
Cooperation With Local leaders .....	72
Interview Scheduling .....	73
How to Conduct Semistructured Interviews .....	73
Interview Recording and Transcription .....	75
Data Management and Storage .....	75
Postinterview Evaluation and Monitoring .....	76
Study Conclusion .....	77
Data Analysis Plan .....	78
Themes .....	79
Examining the Transcripts and Getting Lost in the Data.....	80
Finding Important Phrases and Themes.....	80
Creating Summaries That Are Interpretive.....	81

Examining Individual and Collective Storytelling .....	81
Issues of Trustworthiness and Credibility.....	82
Procedures for Ethics .....	87
Summary.....	89
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Result .....	91
Introduction.....	91
Changes and Updates to Information from Chapters 1–3.....	91
Raw Data Preparation for Analysis Data Gathering Overview .....	92
Braun and Clarke Six Steps .....	94
Step 1: Familiarity With Data.....	94
Step 2: Creating Codes.....	95
Step 3: Developing and Assessing Themes .....	96
Step 4: Reviewing the Themes .....	99
Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes.....	100
Step 6: Writing Up.....	145
Results.....	146
Theme 1: Early Relocation Challenges and Obstacles to Social and Professional Integration .....	147
Theme 2: Getting Around American Workplace Customs and Cultural Expectations.....	152
Theme 3: Stress Reduction and Psychological Adjustment During Resettlement.....	154

Theme 4: Modifying Job Search Techniques and Getting Employment	
Information .....	156
Theme 5: Employment Integration Obstacles, Both Personal and	
Structural.....	158
Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity and Adapting to the American	
Workforce .....	162
Theme 7: The Function of Support Systems in Social and Emotional	
Adjustment.....	163
Theme 8: Adapting Communication in the Workplace and Preserving	
Cultural Identity .....	166
Theme 9: Handling Social Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Afghan Identity	
at Work.....	169
Theme 10: Discrimination at Work and Psychological Coping	
Mechanisms .....	170
Summary of the Findings.....	171
Chapter 5: Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations .....	175
Introduction.....	175
Analysis of the Results.....	176
Theme 1: Difficulties With Early Relocation and Integration Barriers .....	176
Theme 2: Creating Awareness Around American Workplace Culture .....	177
Theme 3: Managing Stress and Adapting Psychologically .....	178
Theme 4: Adaptation to Job Searches and Employment Access .....	179

Theme 5: Individual and Systemic Obstacles to Workplace Integration.....	180
Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity .....	181
Theme 7: Social Adjustment and Support Networks.....	182
Theme 8: Cultural Identity and Communication Adaptation .....	183
Theme 9: Handling Afghan Identity and Stereotypes.....	183
Theme 10: Rebuilding Confidence and Handling Discrimination .....	184
Relevance to the Literature .....	185
Limitations of the Study.....	188
Sample Size and Range.....	188
Language and Interpretation Limitations.....	189
Personal Accounts of Experiences.....	190
Recommendations for Further Study and Implementation.....	190
Positive Social Change Implications .....	192
Empowerment on an Individual and Psychological Level .....	193
Professional and Academic Establishments.....	193
Change at the Policy and Community Level .....	194
The Economic Impact and Stability of Society via Professional Reintegration.....	194
Conclusion .....	196
References.....	198
Appendix A: Interview Guide.....	203
Appendix B: Email Invitation Template.....	205

Appendix C: Interview Log .....	207
Appendix D: Initial Codes Example .....	208
Appendix E: Developing Themes Example.....	209
Appendix F: Themes, Subthemes, and Quotes From Participants.....	210

## List of Tables

Table 1. Interview Log.....	94
Table 2. Initial Codes Example.....	96
Table 3. Developing Themes Example.....	98
Table 4. Themes, Subthemes, and Quotes From Participants.....	102
Table 5. Participant Demographics.....	145

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Theme 1: Early Relocation Challenges and Obstacles to Social and Professional Integration .....	118
Figure 2. Theme 2: Getting Around American Workplace Customs and Cultural Expectations .....	120
Figure 3. Theme 3: Stress Reduction and Psychological Adjustment During Resettlement.....	123
Figure 4. Theme 4: Modifying Job Search Techniques and Getting Employment Information .....	125
Figure 5. Theme 5: Employment Integration Obstacles, Both Personal and Structural.....	129
Figure 6. Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity and Adapting to the American Workforce .....	132
Figure 7. Theme 7: The Function of Support Systems in Social and Emotional Adjustment .....	135
Figure 8. Theme 8: Adapting Communication in the Workplace and Preserving Cultural Identity .....	138
Figure 9. Theme 9: Handling Social Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Afghan Identity at Work .....	140
Figure 10. Theme 10: Discrimination at Work and Psychological Coping Mechanisms .....	142

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

When they relocate to the United States, Afghan refugee professionals encounter a variety of difficult issues that have a substantial influence on their well-being, including job and mental health barriers. According to Stempel and Alemi (2021), Afghan refugees in the United States frequently struggle to find jobs that match their credentials, which can result in underemployment and unstable financial insecurity. Mental health issues brought on by prior trauma and the strain of acculturation exacerbate these economic challenges. Despite their abilities and knowledge, these individuals frequently face significant obstacles, such as underemployment, cultural alienation, and pressures following migration. Emotional scars from trauma experienced before migration, such as experiences of conflict, displacement, and loss, exacerbate these pressures. According to Stempel and Alemi (2021), Afghan refugees in the United States frequently experience underemployment, which contributes to economic instability, and the stress of acculturation is further exacerbated by mental health issues stemming from previous trauma. In the United States, adjusting to a new work environment can be a daunting task, and the psychological and emotional strains that follow frequently obstruct long-term well-being and successful integration. According to Disney and McPherson (2020), there is a strong correlation between work and mental health, with those who are underemployed in their careers frequently experiencing higher levels of psychological discomfort.

The discrepancy between their credentials and the employment prospects that are open to them makes these difficulties even more difficult for Afghan refugee professionals, which can leave them feeling inadequate and frustrated. Afghan communities' stigma around mental health makes matters worse because many people are reluctant to get help (Ahmad et al., 2020).

In this study, I looked at their lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals adjusting to working in American society, in order to gain an enhanced understanding of the difficulties they encounter both at work and during psychological transitions. The study investigates the resilience-building strategies, emotional intelligence, and coping mechanisms of Afghan refugees through participant interviews. Numerous psychological and social issues are highlighted in research on Afghan refugee communities, including post migration stressors that worsen mental health outcomes (Andisha & Lueger-Schuster, 2024). Afghan immigrants sometimes struggle to successfully integrate into American society because of the pressures they encounter upon arrival, such as cultural adjustment, unstable economic conditions, and difficulties in employment. To effectively design support networks and interventions that meet the requirements of Afghan refugee professionals, it is essential to comprehend how these pre- and postmigration stresses affect their mental and social functioning.

Although the literature on refugee mental health is expanding, few studies have addressed the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States. By examining how Afghan refugee professionals manage the psychological effects of their migration experiences while navigating their employment, I sought to close this gap. This

study offers valuable insights into effective coping mechanisms and the potential advantages of non-traditional therapies, making it pertinent and crucial for enhancing the resettlement experience of Afghan refugees.

By describing the history, justification, and importance of investigating the social and psychological difficulties encountered by Afghan refugee professionals in the United States, this chapter acts as an introduction to the research. It emphasizes the psychological and emotional obstacles, including trauma, acculturation stress, and underemployment, that these people face as they try to integrate into the American workforce.

The chapter also emphasizes how important it is to gain a better knowledge of the coping mechanisms used by Afghan refugees. By filling up these gaps in the literature, I hope to educate the creation of culturally relevant support networks and offer insightful information about the experience of Afghan refugees resettling.

The structure of Chapter 1 establishes the framework for the dissertation by giving a comprehensive summary of the subject, outlining the main research questions, and defining the theoretical framework that directed the inquiry. In Chapter 2, I will examine pertinent research on the psychological effects of forced migration, job difficulties, and refugee mental health, with an emphasis on Afghan refugees, after this introduction.

The qualitative research design employed in this study, which was informed by Braun and Clarke's definition of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), will be described in Chapter 3. This chapter will describe how RTA was used to look into the real-life

experiences of professionals who work with Afghan refugees. RTA is ideal for comprehending how Afghan refugee professionals deal with psychological, social, and professional obstacles during resettlement because it offers a flexible yet rigorous framework for examining patterned meanings across participant narratives. The justification for using RTA, the function of reflexivity in the analytical process, and the measures implemented to guarantee transparency and reliability will all be covered in this chapter. Additionally, it will cover the recruitment method, participant requirements, ethical protocols, and semistructured interviewing and analysis process. Chapter 3 provides a clear basis for generating a comprehensive analysis based on the lived reality of participants through these methodological elements.

In Chapter 4, the results of the semistructured interviews with professionals working with Afghan refugees will be discussed. A methodical, reflective thematic analysis of the data will be presented in this chapter in order to pinpoint important themes and shared meaning patterns throughout the participant tales. Through the use of RTA, the results will provide a deep understanding of the psychological and professional obstacles these people face when resettling in the United States. The chapter will examine how Afghan refugee workers perceive and interpret the emotional and psychological effects of migration and cultural adjustment in their work environments. Both analytically sound and highly representative of the participants' actual experiences, the results will be presented.

The results of Chapter 4 will be interpreted in Chapter 5, which will also relate them to the theoretical frameworks, literature reviews, and research questions that were

previously stated in the dissertation. This chapter will explore the consequences of the study's findings, going into the psychological and emotional difficulties that Afghan refugee professionals encounter on the job and how they manage these difficulties. This closing chapter will address the restrictions of the research and suggestions for more research.

### **Background of the Study**

Afghan refugees, especially those with professional backgrounds, encounter complex and significant hurdles when migrating to the United States. Qualitative research on Afghan refugees in Canada found that their trauma was exacerbated by exposure to both direct and indirect threats to their life (Gokani et al., 2023). For instance, one participant described how he was constantly afraid of dying when passing through Taliban checkpoints, which made him feel even more distressed (Gokani et al., 2023). Additionally, they frequently reported distressing situations that affected their general mental health by changing their mood, responsiveness, and cognitive abilities, such as seeing death and injuries (Gokani et al., 2023). Even after relocation, this cumulative trauma still affects their mental health and poses serious obstacles to their social and professional assimilation in new settings. Both their mental health and their ability to integrate into the American labor market are negatively impacted by these experiences. Due to their overqualification for open roles, some Afghan professionals experience underemployment, while others may experience discontent and few prospects for professional advancement. This difficulty does not affect all Afghan professionals, though, since some are able to locate positions that align

with their skills and qualifications. According to Ehrkamp et al. (2022), the late 1990s saw the Balkan Wars and the 2004 Asian tsunami, which solidified the desire for mental health assistance amid humanitarian crises. The emotional toll that Afghan refugees experience as they adapt to new contexts, especially the stress of underemployment, is related to the widespread acknowledgment of mental health issues in displacement situations.

It is crucial to investigate how Afghan refugees deal with both personal and professional difficulties in the face of displacement, even if they show incredible resilience. The psychological effects of migration are commonly disregarded. By concentrating on the difficulties encountered at work, psychological adjustment, and coping strategies of Afghan refugee professionals, I sought to close these gaps. This study will offer insightful information that can guide actions aimed at improving the integration of Afghan refugees into the labor market and society. It will provide useful data that may help direct initiatives to enhance Afghan refugees' assimilation into society and the workforce. Resettling has been extremely difficult for Afghan refugees.

These challenges are made worse by structural impediments that lead to underemployment and unstable economies, such as a lack of familiarity with American working customs and problems recognizing credentials. Refugees face a distinct set of difficulties during the relocation process, which is frequently characterized by a mix of trauma, cultural displacement, and difficulties surviving in a foreign setting. As noted by Ahmad et al. (2020), one of the biggest challenges that many refugees confront is the psychological anguish brought on by the trauma of war, displacement, and the

challenges of acculturating to a new culture. Because they have been exposed to violence, loss, and obligatory migration, Afghan refugees in particular frequently experience anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Moreover, refugees frequently encounter hurdles pertaining to their legal status, language barriers, and the inability to get a permanent job, all of which exacerbate mental health issues. Insufficient English language skills exacerbate feelings of loneliness and make it more difficult for them to find employment that matches their qualifications.

Refugees may experience emotions of alienation and identity loss as they adjust to life in the United States after leaving their war-torn homeland, which can make it challenging for them to start over. The lack of culturally competent mental health care exacerbates the difficulties and may prevent them from getting the help they need to recover. Cultural expectations and the resources that are accessible to refugees frequently diverge, which can cause mistrust and prevent them from seeking mental health care (Ehrkamp et al., 2022). These elements emphasize that in order to help Afghan refugees integrate, treatments that address the psychological as well as the logistical aspects of relocation are necessary.

The resettlement process presents major cultural and professional obstacles for Afghan immigrants, especially professionals. Afghan refugees must overcome cultural hurdles by adjusting to a society that may differ greatly from their own in terms of customs, values, and way of life. Disparities in language, traditions, and social norms can exacerbate loneliness and make it harder to build relationships. Furthermore, discrimination and cultural misconceptions may be experienced by Afghan refugees,

which can worsen their sense of exclusion. According to Agrawal and Venkatesh (2016), Kirmayer et al. (2011), and Moreno et al. (2006), cultural obstacles could discourage refugees from continuing to interact with or seek services. The stigma attached to seeking mental health care within the refugee's cultural community is one such obstacle. In the United States, refugees frequently come from patriarchal and collectivist cultural backgrounds. Gender relations, the function of the client in the community and family, and whether using a systems theoretical framework or an individualistic approach is less culturally suitable than family therapy are all reasons why mental health professionals should be culturally sensitive (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

It may be challenging for refugees to feel like they belong in their new communities because of these cultural hurdles. Afghan refugees, especially those with advanced degrees or professional expertise, sometimes struggle with underemployment in the workplace. Underemployment is a concept that encompasses various forms of poor job fit, such as when an individual has more formal education or higher level skills than the job requires (Feldman, 1996; Verbruggen et al., 2015, as quoted in Disney & McPherson, 2020). According to some, underemployment stunts local economies because skills are wasted (Broadbent et al., 2007, as referenced in Disney & McPherson, 2020).

A large number of Afghan professionals bring degrees and work experience to the United States that are not regarded or acknowledged in the American labor market. They are therefore frequently compelled to take positions that do not align with their abilities, which causes them to get frustrated, hinders their ability to progress in their careers, and creates financial instability. In addition to having an effect on their self-esteem, this

professional mismatch adds to the larger difficulties of resettlement because immigrants may find it difficult to support their families or follow their career goals. Implementing targeted interventions that address their unique cultural requirements and career objectives is necessary to assist Afghan refugee professionals in overcoming the cultural and professional challenges they face. These treatments will assist them in feeling content and successful in their new environment.

Afghan refugee professionals' background is influenced by a variety of cultural, professional, and personal elements that affect their capacity to adapt to life in the United States. Afghan refugees frequently come from cultures that place a high value on professional roles, and many of them are eager to pursue careers in their new country. Afghan refugees frequently experience severe migration-related stress, with their mental health being negatively impacted by prejudice and losing their motherland (Sifat et al., 2024). These postmigration pressures may also impact their capacity to adjust to new work settings, underscoring the significance of customized assistance for their workforce integration. However, there are substantial obstacles to professional integration, as was already indicated. Afghan refugee professionals face significant obstacles when trying to enter the workforce due to inadequate English proficiency and the absence of recognition of international qualifications. There was a substantial correlation between higher mental health issues and lower premigration socioeconomic level (SES) and high postmigration stressors, like prejudice and losing one's motherland (Sifat et al., 2024). These elements may make it more difficult for refugees to function in professional settings because they

may make it harder for them to get employment due to language issues and a lack of acceptance of foreign credentials.

Underemployment or employment in fields unrelated to their skills are frequently the results of this misalignment between their career goals and the realities of the American labor market. Further exacerbating the psychological effects of migration and resettlement is the need to preserve familial and cultural ties. The emotional and psychological toll of exile and the need to support their families financially are two issues that Afghan refugee professionals frequently struggle to manage. Their mental health and general well-being may be significantly impacted by this dual stressor—juggling both personal and professional challenges. According to Yale University School of Medicine (2023), community-building initiatives, linguistic support, and cultural awareness are all essential components of effective interventions for Afghan refugees. This situation emphasizes the necessity of treatments that offer culturally competent and sensitive psychological assistance in addition to addressing the practical difficulties of employment and career advancement for Afghan refugee professionals.

### **Knowledge Gap**

The broad difficulties that refugees confront, especially with regard to trauma, relocation, and integration, have been well studied, but there is still a sizable gap in the literature about the unique experiences of Afghan refugee professionals. The majority of current research concentrates on refugees in general, paying little attention to the particular difficulties experienced by those with more education or professional experience. There is still a lack of research on the underemployment of Afghan refugee

professionals and the psychological effects of navigating a labor market that does not value their skills, especially in the United States. Research on the psychological effects of this occupational mismatch, when coupled with the trauma of relocation and displacement, is lacking. Additionally, although culturally sensitive healing methods or alternative therapeutic approaches for refugees are gaining popularity, little is known about how well these interventions support the mental health and professional integration of Afghan refugees, particularly those with professional backgrounds.

Research on the coping strategies employed by Afghan refugee professionals in navigating both psychological discomfort and career obstacles is also lacking. Without identifying the unique requirements and reactions of professional refugees, a large portion of the current literature concentrates on general refugee coping mechanisms. Afghan refugee professionals are in a unique position where they must juggle the demands of work, cultural adjustment, and mental health recovery, making this gap especially significant. Although coping mechanisms and social support are essential for reducing the impacts of PTSD and other mental health issues, little is known about how these elements precisely manifest themselves in the setting of Afghan refugee professionals. Filling this knowledge gap will help us better understand the difficulties this population faces and how to design interventions that will assist their mental and professional health.

### **Problem Statement**

Since Afghan refugees are underrepresented in psychology research, this study fills a vital knowledge gap about the particular psychological requirements and

challenges that this community faces during the resettlement process (Sifat et al., 2024). Professionals who are Afghan refugees in the United States encounter major psychological and social obstacles that make it difficult for them to fully integrate into American culture. Ongoing psychological health problems like PTSD, anxiety, and depression can be brought on by psychological hurdles like the trauma of being uprooted, witnessing acts of violence, and losing their own country. Afghans are especially susceptible to mental health issues like PTSD, depression, and anxiety because they have experienced trauma like war, violence, and displacement (Kovess-Masfety et al., 2021). Traumatic events have been found to be a strong predictor of increased mental health symptoms, underscoring the importance of psychological support in the integration of refugees (Kurt et al., 2023).

Larios et al. (2023) highlighted the need for focused mental health interventions by pointing out that psychological distress among Afghan refugees is closely associated with integration challenges, especially when it comes to trauma and loss. According to Kurt et al. (2023), the complex interrelationship between cultural adaptation and mental health is demonstrated by the way that traumatic events can occasionally set off coping strategies that aid in a person's assimilation into the host society. The preservation of heritage culture, however, may also be hampered by these experiences. The stress of acclimating to new work settings, where refugees encounter the annoyance of having their professional qualifications disregarded or undervalued, in addition to the difficulties of picking up a new language and cultural norms, frequently makes these psychological problems worse.

According to Larios et al. (2023), the professional integration of Afghan refugees is hindered by a lack of recognition of their qualifications and experience which creates emotions of dissatisfaction and inadequacy as well as underemployment and a lack of career advancement. This is further supported by research by Soltan et al. (2023), which demonstrates how acculturation discrepancies between Afghan refugee parents and their children bring about difficulties that impact adaptation results and lead to psychological distress among emerging adults in refugee families. Professionals who are Afghan refugees must adjust to a new culture that may be very different from their own. This can cause identity issues, feelings of isolation, and trouble forming supportive social networks. In the job and in society, discrimination and cultural misinterpretations make these difficulties even worse, fostering an atmosphere in which Afghan refugees could feel isolated or ostracized. In the end, these social and professional obstacles prevent them from properly assimilating into American society by causing a vicious cycle of annoyance and unhappiness that has a detrimental effect on their mental health. To ensure that Afghan refugee professionals can successfully integrate into the workforce and offer their talents and expertise to society at large, it is imperative that the psychological and social barriers they encounter be addressed.

### **Purpose**

With an emphasis on the effects of social and psychological barriers on their mental health and integration into American culture, this qualitative phenomenological research attempts to investigate the real-life experiences of Afghan refugee professionals who have recently migrated to the United States. The study will look at the difficulties

that these professionals encounter when they cross cultural and professional boundaries, adapt to new work settings, deal with career disruptions, and deal with issues pertaining to credential recognition. In order to improve the integration and mental health outcomes of Afghan refugee professionals, the research aims to offer important insights for the creation of culturally sensitive interventions, policies, and support systems that cater to their particular needs by identifying important themes and factors that affect their psychological and social well-being.

### **Research Question**

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the U.S. navigating social and psychological obstacles in their employment and integration into society?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two important theoretical frameworks serve as the foundation for this investigation: the Stress Appraisal Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. According to Hobfoll's (COR) Theory, stress results from people feeling as though they are losing important resources, including their professional identity, social support, and financial security. These resources are frequently significantly lost for Afghan refugee professionals who are compelled to migrate to the United States, which might worsen psychological suffering. The COR theory thus offers a basis for comprehending how the loss of resources, like social networks or professional positions, leads to stress and affects mental health.

The importance of individual perception influencing stress reactions is highlighted by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress Appraisal Model. The psychological impact of stress is greatly influenced by coping methods, and people assess stressors as manageable or overwhelming, according to this concept. Their assessment of these difficulties frames the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals with stressors, including acclimating to new work environments and cultural differences. According to this model, the mental health and integration results of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States are significantly influenced by their subjective views of stress and coping strategies. With an emphasis on how resource loss and personal stress assessments influence their experiences and general well-being, the COR theory and the Stress Appraisal Model provide a thorough lens through which to view the social and psychological difficulties encountered by Afghan refugee professionals.

### **Nature of the Study**

In order to investigate the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States, this study uses a qualitative phenomenological design. Phenomenology is especially well-suited to comprehending how people perceive and make meaning of their experiences (Aldiabat et al., 2021). As Afghan refugee professionals deal with the problems of integration and resettlement, the study seeks to convey the core of their social and psychological struggles. Data will be gathered through semistructured interviews, which provide participants the opportunity to discuss specific parts of their difficulties in greater detail while also enabling them to give intimate, detailed narratives of their experiences.

With an emphasis on finding and analyzing patterns in the participant narratives, the data analysis will adhere to theme analysis techniques as described by Braun and Clarke (2022). This research will use a qualitative approach, more precisely a phenomenological design, to provide a thorough, contextually based knowledge of how Afghan refugee professionals deal with the pressures of their relocation. An in-depth examination of the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals is made possible by the phenomenological approach, which highlights the psychological and social resources that they feel are essential for successful integration into American culture. Choosing a qualitative approach is a result of the necessity to comprehend people's subjective, individual experiences, which quantitative approaches are unable to fully represent. The nuanced, rich data required to examine the nuances of the emotional and social difficulties this community faces is not provided by quantitative research, despite the fact that it can quantify general trends or correlations. This study makes sure that the research design closely complies with the theoretical frameworks aimed at comprehending the relevance and meaning of people's lived experiences by using a phenomenological design.

### **Definitions**

*Afghan refugee professionals* who were forced to depart Afghanistan and have relocated to the United States after fleeing Afghanistan due to conflict, persecution, or other reasons are known as Afghan refugee professionals. Professionally qualified in healthcare, education, engineering, and other skilled occupations, these individuals have

pursued or are still working in the United States after being resettled (Hosseini et al., 2024).

*Conservation of resources (COR) theory:* Hobfoll (1989) established the COR hypothesis, which states that stress occurs when people believe that their valued resources—like their professional identity, financial security, or social support—are in danger. According to Alemi et al. (2023), the theory emphasizes how crucial it is for Afghan refugees to preserve or reclaim these resources in order to reduce stress and improve resilience during resettlement.

*Phenomenological:* The phenomenological method is centered on comprehending and characterizing people's lived experiences from their own points of view. In the context of complicated, subjective experiences such as those of Afghan refugee professionals acclimating to life in the United States, this research approach places a strong emphasis on investigating how individuals comprehend and apply their own experiences. A thorough, rich investigation of the meanings participants ascribe to their difficulties and resiliency during the relocation process is made possible by this methodology (van Manen, 1990).

*Psychological adjustment:* The term psychological adjustment describes how people deal with the emotional and psychological effects of moving to a new nation, such as overcoming the trauma of displacement, adjusting to cultural differences, and dealing with mental health issues like PTSD, depression, or anxiety. Their capacity for stress management, adaptation, and mental health assistance all have an impact on this process (Kantor et al., 2023).

*Social integration:* This is the process through which people adjust to and engage with their new social surroundings. This entails helping Afghan refugees integrate into their communities' social fabric, build lasting relationships, and interact with American cultural standards. Reducing loneliness and promoting well-being depend on effective social integration (Baumgartner et al., 2024).

*Stress appraisal model:* According to the Stress Appraisal Model, which was presented by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, stress is caused by a person's assessment of external stressors and their perceived capacity to manage them. According to this approach, regulating stress and lessening its detrimental effects on health require both cognitive assessments of stressors and coping mechanisms.

### **Assumptions**

This study's design and methodology are guided by a number of fundamental assumptions. First, it makes the supposition that Afghan refugee professionals will be forthright and truthful in their interviews, offering frank perspectives on their experiences. For a thorough grasp of their lived experiences, it is essential that they be willing to share difficulties with social integration, mental health, and relocation. Second, participants' self-reports of their emotional, psychological, and social experiences are assumed to be true by the study. Despite the possibility of biases like social desirability bias or memory recall problems brought about by the delicate subject matter—which includes possible trauma and psychological difficulties—participants are expected to provide honest and reflective answers. The third premise of the study is that the (COR) Theory and the Stress Appraisal Model are useful and applicable frameworks for

comprehending the stressors that Afghan refugee professionals encounter and their coping mechanisms during resettlement. These models are likely to work well for this group because they are frequently utilized in studies on stress and adaptability in refugee groups

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The research aims to explore the psychological and social challenges faced by Afghan refugee professionals who have moved to the United States. Particularly, the study will concentrate on people who have chosen to pursue professional careers and are now working in specialized occupations. Participants will be chosen from among Afghan refugee communities residing in American cities, and semistructured interviews will be used to collect data. Participants' experiences with professional identity, mental health issues, coping strategies, and social integration will all be investigated in this study. This study aims to investigate the psychological and social challenges faced by Afghan refugee professionals who have moved to the United States. In particular, the study will concentrate on those who have left Afghanistan, are at least eighteen years old, and have decided to work professionally in specialized professions like healthcare, education, engineering, or other trades. By "professional," the research means those who are working in a field that calls for specific knowledge and who have obtained or are pursuing official qualifications. Only Afghan refugees who are at least eighteen years old and actively residing in the United States will be included in this study. Although participants must have moved to the United States, there is no set amount of time they must have spent there.

The study will also concentrate on the experiences of Afghan refugees, but it will not include other refugee groups, and its conclusions might not apply to refugees from other nations. A small sample size (about 10 individuals) will also be used in the study, which could limit the findings' wider relevance. Furthermore, other facets of Afghan refugee professionals' experiences, such as their legal or economic difficulties, will not be examined; instead, the study will solely focus on the social and psychological difficulties they encounter. The utilization of qualitative techniques, particularly in-depth interviews, may yield valuable insights into the experiences of the participants; but, they will not yield quantitative data that can be extrapolated to a broader community of Afghan refugees. The goal is to examine the complex experiences of this particular group and produce knowledge that may help guide support services and focused interventions.

### **Limitations**

This study's main drawback is the difficulty in finding a large enough sample of Afghan refugee professionals who are open to taking part in semi structured interviews. Potential participants may be limited by their demanding work schedules, ongoing psychological stress, or challenges adjusting to a new culture. Barriers to communication may also present difficulties, although the researcher's fluency in Dari reduces the need for outside translators and improves the precision of data gathering. Additionally, talking about delicate subjects like mental health and social integration runs the danger of making participants uncomfortable or re-traumatizing them. To solve these issues, ethical factors such as getting informed consent, protecting privacy, and providing mental health help when necessary, will be crucial. Additionally, bias may be introduced during data

collection and analysis due to the researcher's dual roles as an interviewer and facilitator; this will be lessened by open documentation and reflective practices. Finally, the breadth and depth of the findings may be impacted by practical limits, such as time constraints for the researcher and participants, and the lengthy time needed for qualitative data collecting and analysis. These restrictions emphasize how crucial it is to do research with meticulous preparation, cultural awareness, and ethical adherence. Heim et al. (2021) state that getting informed permission, protecting participant privacy, and managing time restrictions are only a few of the ethical and practical difficulties that researchers who work with refugee populations frequently encounter. These issues are all pertinent to this study.

When people think back on prior experiences, particularly emotionally charged ones, they may distort their memories or perceptions, a phenomenon known as retrospective bias. Professionals who are Afghan refugees may have challenges related to traumatic experiences, such as violence, displacement, or unstable social and economic conditions. Years later, when one reflects on such incidents, memories may become skewed or lacking. Participants may either downplay or overstate the magnitude of their struggles as a result of this bias, which may influence how they articulate their struggles and resiliency. For instance, someone may remember their assimilation into American culture more favorably than they actually did, or they may overstate the drawbacks of their relocation experience. Because participants' recollections may not always be true reflections of their actual experiences, researchers must take this bias into account when evaluating interview data. Rather than sharing their actual feelings or experiences,

participants may give answers they feel are more desired or socially acceptable, a phenomenon known as social desirability bias. Research on delicate subjects, such as identity problems, social integration difficulties, and mental health difficulties—all of which Afghan refugee professionals may encounter—can be especially biased. If participants fear shame or condemnation from the researcher or society at large, they may feel under pressure to give responses that they believe will portray them in a favorable manner. For example, to avoid coming out as weak or unappreciative of the chance to start again, a refugee may minimize the severity of their emotional pain or the challenges they are having integrating into their professional role in the United States.

The study can employ the following tactics to lessen social desirability and hindsight biases:

**Building Trust:** In order for participants to feel at ease discussing their candid experiences, it is essential to build rapport and provide a secure, accepting environment. Participants may feel more at ease if anonymity and the study's goal are emphasized.

**Promoting Reflexivity:** The researcher should examine and acknowledge any potential biases in order to practice reflexivity. This involves considering the potential effects of their experiences, background, or opinions on the data collection procedure and their interpretation of participant replies.

**Open-ended Questions:** By using open-ended questions, applicants are able to freely state their beliefs without being pressured to provide responses that may be influenced by social desirability. This approach promotes open communication about difficulties and coping strategies.

Probing and Clarification: To probe more into answers that may appear unduly generic or socially motivated, the researcher may provide follow-up questions during the interview. More in-depth investigation of participants' life experiences is made possible via probing. The study can produce more accurate and perceptive results that accurately depict the actual difficulties Afghan refugee professionals encounter while navigating their resettlement, integration, and work experiences in the US by addressing these biases.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is remarkable because it sheds light on the particular difficulties Afghan refugee professionals encounter when resettling in the US. Recent research demonstrates the multifaceted difficulties Afghan refugees encounter, such as stress associated with migration, abrupt evacuation, and the strains of relocating to a foreign country, all of which have a substantial negative influence on their mental health and general well-being (Sifat et al., 2024). These difficulties are consistent with the important issues discussed by Rai et al. (2023), which involve the intense challenges of acclimating to a new nation and experiencing family separation. The study helps fill important gaps in the literature about this underrepresented group by examining their work experiences and psychological adaptations. By educating policymakers, mental health professionals, and community organizations on the unique needs and obstacles encountered by Afghan refugees, the findings can facilitate the creation of focused interventions and support initiatives. Furthermore, by focusing on cultural and psychological aspects, the study advances our knowledge of refugees' resilience and adaptability and provides useful

recommendations for enhancing mental health and integration outcomes. By providing information about the unique difficulties Afghan refugees encounter in socially and psychologically adjusting to new surroundings, the study's conclusions can directly assist this demographic.

The study's identification of important stressors and coping strategies can help guide focused programs, laws, and support networks meant to enhance the integration and general well-being of Afghan refugees. By fostering a more supportive environment, these suggestions can lessen mental health issues, increase resilience, and eventually facilitate Afghan refugees' effective assimilation into American society. Afghan refugees can also make a substantial contribution to the workforce provided they are given the attention and support they require and only need minimal help finding suitable employment. If effectively utilized, their expertise and credentials can strengthen the American economy, resulting in a win-win situation where the refugees and society at large prosper.

### **Summary**

This study examines the psychological transition and work experiences of Afghan refugee professionals who have relocated to the United States, emphasizing their particular difficulties and coping mechanisms. Afghan refugees have cultural and psychological challenges that are essential to comprehending their adaptability and resilience in the United States, with implications for integration support and mental health interventions (Sifat et al., 2024). It recognizes a number of constraints, including the possibility of participant suffering, ethical issues, and sample size problems. The

study fills in gaps in the literature and provides insightful information for groups that serve refugees, mental health practitioners, and politicians. The value of matching the client's and counselor's linguistic and cultural background is one significant discovery. The study fosters a shared understanding of cultural norms and conventions, which is crucial for resilience building.

Through the implementation of ethical and culturally sensitive research methods, this project seeks to enhance interventions that promote the integration and mental health of Afghan refugees. The Value Based Counseling (VBC) method may be very helpful in addressing the difficulties this population has since it gives clients the ability to examine their symptoms, ideas, and feelings as well as how these affect their day-to-day functioning. In order to improve mental health outcomes for refugees, Orang et al. (2023) point out that the VBC approach can be a crucial tactic in helping clients comprehend their emotional judgment and see how their values and motivations impact their behavior. This suggestion will be reinforced by a thorough literature review in Chapter 2, which will highlight the value of culturally aware interventions

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The literature on the psychological and social difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals in the US is thoroughly reviewed in this chapter. Additionally, it explores theories that are pertinent to comprehending this group's experiences, specifically those pertaining to stress, resilience, and adaptation. This literature review's objectives are to lay out the theoretical foundation for the investigation and examine earlier studies that have examined comparable issues encountered by refugee populations, particularly those fleeing war-torn areas like Afghanistan. This chapter aims to establish a basis for comprehending how Afghan refugee professionals deal with the psychological and social aspects of their resettlement and integration process, as well as how their experiences connect to the larger refugee experience, by combining the results of previous research.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Finding pertinent literature for this research was essential to developing the theoretical framework and comprehending the experiences of professionals working with Afghan refugees. The literature was gathered in a methodical manner, using a variety of scholarly databases and tools to guarantee a thorough review of the body of research. A thorough literature search was carried out for this study using a number of scholarly databases to guarantee a wide range of pertinent sources. Google Scholar, ProQuest, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and SAGE Journals were the main databases that were accessed. "Afghan Refugees," "Refugee Integration," "Professional Integration," "Cultural Adaptation," and "Refugee Workforce Integration" were among the keywords used to

focus the search on studies that were particularly pertinent to the integration of Afghan refugees. "Qualitative Phenomenological Study" and other search phrases were used to concentrate on qualitative research methodologies, especially those that use phenomenology. "Challenges faced by refugee professionals," "Social Identity of Refugees," and "Acculturation" were among the terms examined in order to increase knowledge of the difficulties encountered by Afghan professionals.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Two important theoretical frameworks were found to help put the difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals in perspective: the Stress Appraisal Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. Through the prism of these ideas, the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals can be comprehended, particularly with regard to their coping mechanisms, stress management, and environmental adaptation.

#### **The Conservation Theory of Resources**

According to Stevan E. Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, people work hard to preserve, safeguard, and get resources that are essential to their well-being. These resources might be psychological (like self-worth and identity), social (like connections and support systems), or physical (like money and belongings). According to the notion, stress results from people feeling as though these resources are in danger or are being lost. According to Hobfoll (1989), people will feel more stressed if they believe that their basic resources are in danger. This tension can have detrimental effects on their emotional, social, and psychological well-being. According to COR Theory, people experience stress when they believe that their important resources—like

their identity, social support, or financial security are in danger. Stress is most felt when people experience real or possible losses of vital resources. The danger can be there now or it might materialize in the future. According to Vargas Rubilar and Oros (2021), Lazarus and Folkman's (1986) interactional model of stress provides a conceptual framework that enables us to comprehend not only the context, but also the mediators and potential outcomes of psychological stress. This viewpoint holds that stress results from interactions with the environment that are viewed as dangerous. An individual may experience severe stress and find it difficult to adjust, for instance, if they are unable to preserve their career standing or social ties. Resource Gain and Investment On the other hand, people also benefit when they successfully conserve or acquire resources. Gains in resources can help support improved environmental adaption and act as a stress buffer. Therefore, putting money into strategies that protect or improve them—like creating social networks of people who are supportive of one another—can lower stress and boost general well-being. The COR theory explains that in order to adapt, expand resources, make progress from losses, and protect against resource loss, people have to spend resources, make progress from losses, and protect against resource loss, people have to spend resources (Chen, Westman, &Hobfoll, 2015). Furthermore, a crucial part of the resilience process is that "resource gains turn out to be strong where main or continued resource loss has been practiced (Chen et al., 2015).

Resource Loss Spirals: The idea of resource loss spirals is among the less advantageous features of COR Theory. According to this theory, people may find it harder to handle new stressors after they have lost their resources, which could result in a

vicious cycle of resource depletion. According to McLinton et al. (2023), resource loss spirals can generally happen when an initial loss of resources causes additional losses in a downward, negative spiral. The confusing effect of related stress, the fact that resource loss has a bigger effect on well-being than resource gain, and the fact that there are fewer resources available to prevent additional losses all contribute to the maintenance of these spirals.

### **Linking the Dissertation's Topic to Conservation of Resources Theory:**

#### **Comprehending the Challenges Faced by Afghan Refugee Professionals in the United States**

The stress and difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals resettling in the United States can be better understood by using the COR Theory, which was put forth by Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989. According to this theoretical viewpoint, people work hard to acquire, safeguard, and maintain resources that are necessary for their well-being. These resources fall into three categories: psychological, social, and physical. Each of these areas is essential to an individual's stability and standard of living. We can learn more about the significant difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals by putting the COR theory to use. This is especially true when it comes to the loss of crucial resources during their relocation.

#### ***Afghan Refugees and the Effects of Resource Loss***

Resource loss, which happens when people lose valued resources or believe that these resources are in danger, is one of the main concepts of COR Theory. This hypothesis contends that the loss of important resources frequently has negative

psychological, social, and emotional repercussions and that it is a notable cause of stress.

In the process of resettlement in the United States, Afghan refugee professionals often lose a number of vital resources that are essential to their general well-being, such as professional identity, financial stability, and social relationship.

### ***Social Network Loss***

When Afghan refugees settle in the United States, one of the biggest losses they suffer is the interruption of their social networks. Professionals from Afghanistan may have had close relationships with friends, family, and coworkers back home, which bolstered their feeling of cultural identification and belonging while also offering emotional support. But when they are compelled to leave their homes because of war, persecution, or other life-threatening situations, these people have to leave behind their networks of social support. Being cut off from close-knit societies can cause intense loneliness and isolation. When Afghan refugees settle in the United States, one of the biggest losses they suffer is the interruption of their social networks. Professionals from Afghanistan may have had close relationships with friends, family, and coworkers back home, which bolstered their feeling of cultural identification and belonging while also offering emotional support. But when they are compelled to leave their homes because of war, persecution, or other life-threatening situations, these people have to leave behind their networks of social support. Being cut off from close-knit societies can cause intense loneliness and isolation.

### ***Decrease in Financial Stability***

Upon resettlement, many Afghan refugees lose another vital resource: financial security. It's possible that many professionals in Afghanistan had secure jobs that gave them a sense of security and financial independence. Upon arrival in the United States, these experts can discover that their credentials and professional background are not as regarded or acknowledged. This could result in financial instability and a worse standard of living for Afghan refugees who have trouble obtaining acceptable jobs.

A sense of dissatisfaction and powerlessness frequently accompany the loss of financial stability. People are more prone to feel stressed and anxious when they believe that their financial resources are in danger, according to the COR Theory. As they must adapt to a new economic environment with few resources available to them, Afghan migrants may experience severe psychological distress as a result. Their capacity to obtain housing, healthcare, or education, among other aspects of their lives, may also be impacted by financial instability.

### ***Decrease in Professional Identity***

The feeling of purpose and self-worth of many Afghan refugee professionals was closely linked to their professional identities and jobs. They frequently lose their professional identity as a result of the difficulties associated with resettlement, which hinder them from pursuing their prior employment. Afghan refugees may feel devalued and estranged from their prior selves as a result of the US labor market's undervaluation of their competencies and experiences. According to COR Theory, losing one's professional identity is very important since it may have an effect on one's mental health.

The inability to pursue their careers or find fulfilling employment is more likely to cause mental discomfort for people who find meaning and self-worth in their work. A sense of low self-worth can result from not being able to use one's abilities and knowledge, which can worsen stress and lower general well-being.

### ***Resource Achievement and Its Purpose in Aiding Afghan Refugees***

In order to recover from the first loss of resources, Afghan migrants must first establish new social networks. Local Afghan communities, community organizations, and resettlement agencies in the US can frequently offer a welcoming atmosphere where refugees can reestablish social ties and a sense of identity. Making new acquaintances and forming support networks helps lessen feelings of loneliness and isolation while giving refugees emotional stability throughout the challenging resettlement process. Social support makes Afghan refugees more capable of handling the difficulties of acculturation and adaptability. Additionally, these social networks can make it easier to access resources like housing, jobs, and legal aid. More resilience in the face of hardship and better psychological well-being are likely to be experienced by refugees when they believe they have access to supportive relationships.

### ***Support for Employment and Finances***

Financial stability and jobs are two other crucial areas where Afghan refugees might obtain resources. Finding acceptable employment might be difficult for many refugees at first, but for those who are successful in finding a job or receiving government assistance, stress levels may drop significantly. One important resource that can protect against the detrimental consequences of stress is financial stability, according

to the COR theory. Financial stability and a sense of control over their lives are restored for Afghan refugee professionals as they are able to access career prospects. Additionally, some refugees might be able to continue their professional development in the United States by enrolling in additional training programs or educational courses. Afghan refugees can acquire better-paying or more satisfying occupations and re-establish their professional identities with the aid of these skill-building opportunities. In addition to improving their financial status, gaining new credentials and abilities boosts their confidence and sense of self-worth.

### ***Integrating Culture and Community***

For Afghan refugees, the process of integrating into the society and culture is an essential resource in addition to the financial and professional benefits. A stable and welcoming environment can be achieved by successful integration into American society, making refugees feel less alienated and more like contributing members of their new community. By taking part in social gatherings, community groups, and cultural events, Afghan refugees can learn about American culture and retain their cultural history while also promoting their integration. Afghan migrants may find that this process of cultural assimilation gives them a renewed sense of agency and autonomy. By actively interacting with their new surroundings, refugees can establish positive feedback loops that enable them to overcome obstacles like discrimination or language hurdles because they feel more connected and empowered.

Multiple stresses, including the loss of professional identity, financial security, and social networks, might compound to make it more difficult for Afghan refugees to

heal and adjust. Resettlement difficulties frequently worsen with time, making it hard for Afghan refugees to return to their prior degrees of stability. Experiencing continuous loss can make one feel hopeless, which makes stress and mental health problems worse. Supportive organizations, community networks, and mental health services play a crucial role in assisting refugees in escaping resource loss cycles and starting the healing process in these situations.

In conclusion, The COR Theory offers a thorough framework for comprehending the stress and difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals during resettlement when applied to their experiences in the US. Resettlement can have a negative psychological and emotional impact for migrants, as highlighted by COR Theory, which focuses on the loss of important resources such as social networks, financial security, and professional identity. The theory does, however, also highlight the possibility of resource gain, since Afghan refugees can decrease their stress levels and enhance their general well-being by effectively reestablishing their financial and social resources. Because of this, it is crucial to create policies and support networks that make it easier to acquire resources and lessen the detrimental consequences of resource loss, guaranteeing Afghan refugee professionals have the finest

For Afghan refugees, preserving important assets like their social support networks and professional identities may be essential to coping with the pressures of relocation. Alemi et al. (2023) state that Afghan refugee professionals who are able to maintain or restore these vital resources—such as reestablishing connections with their families, communities, and professional networks—are likely to deal with less stress and

have better success during their integration process. The capacity of Afghan refugees to reestablish social connections or employment prospects in their new country is also crucial for their emotional and psychological reintegration. The COR Theory highlights the significance of resource maintenance and recovery in overcoming these obstacles and offers a paradigm for comprehending how Afghan refugees deal with the emotional and psychological problems they encounter. According to Alemi et al. (2023), Afghan refugee professionals may become more stressed as a result of losing these resources throughout the relocation process, which could negatively impact their mental health and ability to successfully assimilate into American society. According to the hypothesis, if Afghan refugees can maintain or reclaim these resources—such as their social networks and professional identity—they will encounter less stress and adjust more successfully.

#### **Model for Assessing Stress: Lazarus and Folkman (1984)**

The cognitive processes that go into how people perceive and manage stress are highlighted by the Stress Appraisal Model, which was created in 1984 by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman. In contrast to theories that exclusively concentrate on external stressors, the Stress Appraisal Model emphasizes the significance of an individual's subjective interpretation of circumstances and how they evaluate their capacity to handle these difficulties. This concept posits that stress occurs when people view a situation as intimidating, difficult, or overpowering and believe they don't have the resources to deal with it effectively.

Stress, according to Lazarus and Folkman, involves two main kinds of appraisals:

The first assessment of whether a situation is dangerous, difficult, or frightening is known as the primary appraisal. Stress is likely to occur if the person believes that the incident threatens their identity or well-being. Following the threat assessment, people do a secondary appraisal in which they weigh their options and available resources to determine how well they can handle the stressor. People's perceptions of their ability to manage stress are shaped by this evaluation process, which also affects the coping mechanisms they will use.

### **Important Elements of the Model for Stress Appraisal**

The process of determining the importance of a situation or occurrence is known as cognitive appraisal. Whether or whether a circumstance is interpreted as a stressor depends on the individual. For instance, an Afghan immigrant may view the challenge of obtaining employment as a serious danger to their self-esteem, which could result in stress.

### ***Coping Mechanisms***

People opt for either problem-focused (aggressively showing the stressor) or emotion-focused (handling emotional responses to the stressor) coping mechanisms based on the secondary assessment. In addition to helping people adjust to new circumstances, effective coping mechanisms can lessen the detrimental impacts of stress.

### ***Reappraisal***

The way a stressor is viewed and handled might alter as a result of people reevaluating a situation over time in light of fresh knowledge or experiences. This dynamic process is essential for long-term problem-solving.

### **Relationship Between the Dissertation and the Stress Appraisal Model**

Afghan refugee professionals' perceptions and reactions to the difficulties they encounter during the resettlement process can be better understood by using the Stress Appraisal Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The model places a strong emphasis on the cognitive assessment of stressors and the coping mechanisms used, which is pertinent to the study's focus on Afghan refugees negotiating the psychological and occupational pressures of moving to the US. The primary and secondary assessment processes are highlighted in this model, which offers a lens through which to examine how these people view the opportunities, hazards, and threats posed by their new surroundings.

#### ***Afghan Refugee Professionals' Stressors***

As Afghan refugees adjust to life in the United States, they face a distinct set of pressures. Language hurdles, systematic discrimination, loss of professional identity, cultural dislocation, and underemployment or unemployment are frequently the causes of these stressors.

The loss of accustomed practices, traditions, and social institutions is referred to as cultural displacement. The sudden shift to a more individualistic society from a collectivist one may make Afghan migrants feel even more alone and alienated. The Stress Appraisal Model emphasizes how crucial primary appraisals are in these kinds of situations. Afghan refugees may feel that cultural differences threaten their sense of self and community, especially if they are unable to establish communal or cultural ties in their new environment.

Many professionals who are refugees from Afghanistan come with advanced degrees and a wealth of expertise in industries like engineering, healthcare, and education. However, they are frequently unable to find work in their industries due to systemic obstacles such as employer bias, language competence requirements, and credential recognition. Their sense of purpose and self-worth are at risk, so losing their professional identity can be very distressing. These migrants may perceive their unemployment as a failure to support their family or carry out their social obligations based on primary evaluation, which would increase their stress levels.

Refugees may encounter difficulties navigating daily chores, obtaining assistance, or advocating themselves due to language issues. Systemic discrimination in the workplace, housing market, and healthcare system frequently exacerbates these impediments. Afghan refugees may experience a weakened feeling of agency and resort to maladaptive coping strategies like avoidance or withdrawal when they believe that such structural barriers are insurmountable.

### ***The Function of Cognitive Evaluations in Stress Reduction***

The Stress Appraisal Model emphasizes primary appraisal and secondary assessment as two essential elements of cognitive evaluation. A situation potential to endanger well-being is evaluated in primary appraisal, and the resources available to address the perceived threat are evaluated in secondary assessment. The ability of Afghan refugees to adjust to their new surroundings is seriously impacted by both processes. Afghan refugees frequently view relocation-related issues including job loss, cultural displacement, and family separation, and job loss, cultural displacement, and family

separation as dangers to their mental and social health. For instance, a lack of culturally relevant support systems might make people feel vulnerable and afraid. The context for how refugees views their entire resettlement experience is established by these initial evaluations.

On the other hand, secondary evaluation assesses how much Afghan refugees think they can handle these pressures. For example, problem-focused coping methods are more likely to be adopted by refugees who feel prepared with resources, such as language classes, job training programs, or community support. People who feel they don't have enough resources, on the other hand, could turn to emotion-focused coping mechanisms like turning to religion or avoiding stressful situations.

The Value of Reappraisal: Emphasizing reappraisal—the dynamic process of reinterpreting a situation in light of new knowledge or experiences—is one of the Stress Appraisal Model's main advantages. A reevaluation of Afghan refugees could include:

- **Appreciating Progress:** Resettlement can be viewed as manageable rather than overwhelming when minor successes are celebrated, such as landing a part-time job or becoming more fluent in English.
- **Changing Expectations:** Modifying objectives to conform to the conditions of their new setting, such as working toward professional requalification or pursuing alternate career options.
- **Developing Resilience:** Considering past setbacks and using past tenacity to confront present difficulties with a fresh sense of resolve.

### *Social Integration and Mental Health Consequences*

The relationship between coping strategies, cognitive appraisals, and general adaptation is emphasized by the Stress Appraisal Model. Successful integration and improved mental health outcomes are more likely for Afghan refugee professionals who use adaptive coping techniques and view stressors as manageable. Maladaptive evaluations and coping strategies, on the other hand, can increase stress, worry, and feelings of failure.

By using this model, scholars, decision-makers, and professionals can gain a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the resettlement experiences of Afghan refugees. The following specific interventions can be designed with this thinking in mind:

- Counseling that is sensitive to cultural norms and values in Afghanistan is known as culturally sensitive counseling.
- Employment Programs: Providing specialized job placement assistance that takes into account the professional capabilities of refugees and addresses certification obstacles.
- Community engagement initiatives include lowering cultural displacement, promoting a sense of belonging, and giving Afghan refugees a chance to interact with their host communities.

The Stress Appraisal Model provides a thorough framework for comprehending how professionals working with Afghan refugees view and handle the difficulties of resettlement. The aspects that impact mental health and social integration outcomes are

clarified by this model, which looks at the cognitive processes of evaluation, coping methods, and reappraisal. Resilience, stress reduction, and successful adaptation to life in the United States can all be achieved by incorporating this concept into research and practice to improve support networks for Afghan refugees.

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress Appraisal Model focuses on how people evaluate outside pressures and their capacity to manage them. The significance of cognitive appraisal—the way refugees evaluate the stressors they encounter during the resettlement process—and coping strategies is emphasized by this paradigm. Cultural relocation, loss of professional identity, or difficulties finding work can all cause stress for Afghan refugee professionals. How people view the circumstances and the coping mechanisms at their disposal—such as neighborhood resources, social support systems, and psychological fortitude—have an impact on their capacity to handle this stress. Incorporating these two theoretical stances will help the study better understand how Afghan refugee professionals deal with the social, psychological, and emotional difficulties they face as they adjust to life in the United States.

Complementary viewpoints provided by the Stress Appraisal Model and COR Theory enhance our comprehension of the adaptation processes of Afghan refugee professionals. The COR Theory stresses the significance of preserving and replenishing essential resources, whereas the Stress Appraisal Model concentrates on how people view and manage stressors. The psychological and social difficulties that Afghan refugee professionals encounter as they adapt to life in the United States can be fully understood by combining these theories.

When Afghan refugees believe that their resources—like their social support, professional identity, or financial stability—are in danger, for example, they may experience stress. Their emotional responses and coping mechanisms will be influenced by how they evaluate these stressors (both main and secondary). Refugees are likely to feel less stressed and adapt more successfully if they can recover or maintain these resources, claims COR Theory. Spirals of resource loss, on the other hand, can exacerbate the stress assessment process, resulting in increased emotional distress and integration difficulties.

Through the use of both theories, this research may investigate how Afghan refugee professionals view the stressors associated with resettlement, the resources they depend on, and the coping mechanisms they use. Interventions that help Afghan refugees preserve or restore essential resources and use useful coping strategies to facilitate their assimilation into American society can be guided by these principles.

## **Literature Review**

### **Refugees' Adjustment Psychologically**

#### ***Refugee Prevalence and Displacement Factors***

117.3 million people were forcibly displaced globally as of 2023, including internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, asylum seekers, and those who required international protection (UNHCR, 2023). The UNHCR has designated 31.6 million people as refugees, representing a sizeable share of the world's population. There are several reasons why these people leave their native nations, but the most frequent ones include political unrest, military conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses. For instance,

following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the civil wars that followed, and the more recent U.S. military presence that concluded in 2021, conflict-driven migration has been a persistent pattern in the case of Afghan refugees. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2022), there were an estimated 5.7 million Afghan refugees living outside of Afghanistan as of 2023, the majority of them were in Pakistan and Iran, two nearby countries.

The causes of forced migration are multifaceted and include both immediate dangers to one's personal safety as well as more general sociopolitical and economic upheaval. Afghan refugees now consider escaping to be a survival tactic because to the decades-long violence in their homeland, which has been exacerbated by both internal conflict and outside operations. The 2021 U.S. military withdrawal was another pivotal moment in Afghan migration, as many Afghans, including former U.S. military and government personnel, fled their country out of fear of persecution under the Taliban's resurgence (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

### ***Refugees' Adjustment Psychologically***

Cultural adaptation, social integration, and trauma resolution are just a few of the many challenges that migrants must navigate during the psychological adjustment process. Losing their professional identity, being cut off from their families, and dealing with prejudice and discrimination in their new countries all contribute to the psychological difficulties faced by Afghan refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Anxiety, despair, and PTSD are among the mental health issues that many migrants face during the lengthy and difficult adjustment process (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

It can be difficult for refugees to start over in settings that are socially and culturally different from their home nations. Afghan refugees, in particular, have to adapt to the collectivist principles that are common in Afghanistan to the relatively individualistic culture of nations like the United States. This change may result in feelings of alienation and loneliness, which worsen mental health issues. A key element in reducing these problems is social integration. Whether through professional connections or community support, refugees who are able to build strong social networks frequently exhibit greater resilience and improved psychological adjustment over time (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

The difficulty of finding jobs that fit their skills when they return to the labor also impacts the mental health of Afghan refugees in the United States, many of whom are highly educated professionals. Psychological distress is significantly exacerbated by feelings of career stagnation and identity loss brought on by the nonrecognition of foreign degrees and the lack of professional networks (UNHCR, 2023). Research shows that refugees who can follow alternative career paths or professional development activities tend to have better psychological results because they help them regain a feeling of purpose and self-worth (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

### ***Adaptation Techniques and Resilience***

Coping with the pressures of migration and resettlement has a significant impact on refugees' psychological adjustment. Afghan refugees frequently use both community-based and individual coping strategies, just like other displaced groups. Religious rituals, cultural engagement, and the development of social support networks in their new nations

are a few examples. Strong family ties and involvement with community organizations help Afghan refugees cope with the psychological effects of displacement and reduce social isolation, according to research (UNHCR, 2023).

Resilience is also essential to the process of adjustment. People who are resilient are more capable of adjusting to unfamiliar situations and overcoming hardship with a sense of control. Internal strengths like optimism and personal coping mechanisms, as well as external support systems like social networks, community groups, and government aid, are frequently used to build resilience (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). By helping Afghan refugees develop effective coping mechanisms, resilience-oriented mental health interventions—like those that emphasize strengths-based approaches—can promote social integration and psychological recovery.

### ***Conclusion***

Reestablishing personal and professional identities, adjusting to new cultural settings, and negotiating the stressors of relocation are all components of the complex psychological adjustment process that Afghan refugees, like other displaced groups, go through. The hurdles of finding work in new, unfamiliar markets and the loss of established social institutions exacerbate the problems these people encounter. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that community networks and mental health therapies catered to their individual needs can greatly enhance their general well-being, highlighting the importance of social support and resilience in assisting refugees with their adjustment. In order to develop efficient support networks that cater to their particular difficulties,

further study on the psychological effects of refugee resettlement—particularly for Afghan refugees—is necessary going forward.

Much study has been done on refugees' psychological adjustment, with a particular emphasis on the mental health issues individuals encounter when they are resettled. Refugees, notably Afghan refugees, are particularly vulnerable to psychological well-being circumstances such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD, according to studies (Kantor et al., 2023). Significantly contributing to these mental health issues are the trauma of displacement, exposure to violence, and the loss of family and home. Because of the unique political and socioeconomic changes in Afghanistan, Afghan refugees in particular may suffer from increased psychological anguish (Hosseini et al., 2024).

Alemi et al. (2023) offer important insights into the psychological and professional challenges faced by Afghan refugee professionals during their relocation efforts. Their research focuses on Afghan refugees, especially professionals, and examines the effects of trauma from forced migration and difficulties integrating professionally in a new setting on their mental health and career reintegration. These findings indicate the particular obstacles to the social and professional integration of Afghan refugee professionals, which is crucial for comprehending the emotional and psychological strains they endure.

In particular, Alemi et al. (2023) look into the mental health issues and professional barriers Afghan refugee professionals face when trying to return to the employment in their host nations, with an emphasis on the US. Examining the relationship between mental health issues, losing one's professional identity, and the

challenges these people encounter in reestablishing their jobs upon relocation makes the study noteworthy.

In Alemi et al.'s (2023) study, Afghan refugees with a range of professional backgrounds—such as healthcare, engineering, and education—are trying to reestablish themselves in a new setting. Using a mixed-methods approach, the researchers looked into how forced migration affected the identity, career reintegration, and mental health of Afghan refugee professionals by combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.

Interviews and surveys were used to gather data for the research. While the questionnaires were intended to evaluate the professional credentials, work status, and career goals of Afghan refugee professionals, the interviews offered more in-depth information about the psychological effects of unemployment or underemployment. While thematic analysis was used for the interview data, statistical analysis was used to examine the survey data and find trends pertaining to professional standing. Key themes included identity loss, irritation over qualifications not being recognized, and emotions of alienation were discovered by the researchers.

According to the survey, professionals who were refugees from Afghanistan encountered many obstacles when trying to resume their jobs in the US. One significant finding was the decline in one's professional identity. As a result of their inability to locate jobs that matched their training and prior work experience, many immigrants felt frustrated and unworthy. Furthermore, immigrants found it difficult to demonstrate the

worth of their professional background and credentials in a new setting due to the nonrecognition of foreign credentials.

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Apart from their research on professional integration, Alemi et al. (2023) carried out a more comprehensive thematic evaluation of the psychological and mental health of Afghan refugees during the previous forty years. Notwithstanding the implementation of numerous evidence-based psychological interventions and community-based support initiatives, this research found that there is still a sizable lack of culturally appropriate strategies catered to the unique mental health requirements of Afghan refugees. These results are especially pertinent to the dissertation topic because they highlight the necessity of creating targeted, culturally relevant interventions to help Afghan refugee professionals deal with their psychological and professional difficulties.

Despite the introduction of mental health support services, Alemi et al. (2023) found that these interventions frequently fall short of meeting the special requirements of Afghan refugees, especially those who have been displaced by force or have been affected by conflict. This emphasizes how vital culturally competent mental health

services are to maintain the health and facilitate the social and professional integration of Afghan refugee professionals.

The contribution of community support to the improvement of Afghan refugees' mental health outcomes is another significant finding from Alemi et al. (2023). Their findings demonstrated the importance of robust support systems and community linkages in reducing depressive and isolating symptoms among Afghan refugees living in the United States. According to the study, the establishment of strong community support networks helps shield refugees from mental health issues, which is essential for improving their general well-being.

Afghan refugee professionals are especially in need of this kind of assistance since they frequently deal with issues that go beyond simple resettlement, such as the psychological effects of identity loss and the frustration of professional underemployment. Community support systems have the potential to mitigate the anguish resulting from these issues by promoting a sense of belonging and offering professional and social networks.

The difficulties Afghan refugees, especially those with professional backgrounds, confront in their mental health and careers are crucially explained by Alemi et al. (2023). Since mental health issues and the loss of one's professional identity are closely related, the study's conclusions are directly related to the dissertation's focus on the psychological adjustment of Afghan refugee professionals. It is essential to comprehend the unique psychological and professional obstacles faced by Afghan refugee professionals in order to create solutions that tackle these intricate issues.

According to the findings, professional integration programs designed specifically for Afghan refugee professionals are just as important as psychological support services. This covers the acceptance of foreign qualifications, chances for professional advancement, and the delivery of culturally aware and situationally relevant mental health services. Afghan refugees' integration and general well-being can be greatly enhanced by attending to these concerns.

The significance of community-based support networks in aiding refugees' psychological adjustment is also emphasized by Alemi et al. (2023). The dissertation will profit from this discovery since it emphasizes the possible advantages of incorporating community support programs into larger resettlement programs, which will help Afghan refugee professionals integrate both professionally and psychologically.

Additionally, the process of acculturation might lead to higher stress. Language hurdles, cultural conventions, and unaccustomed professional demands are just a few of the challenges Afghan refugees face on a daily basis. Feelings of isolation and alienation brought on by these difficulties may possibly have a bad effect on their psychological well-being and ability to assimilate into American society (Groen et al., 2018).

Furthermore, research on populations of refugees emphasizes the value of community support in reducing the psychological repercussions of displacement, with robust social networks acting as a buffer against mental health issues (Alemi et al., 2023).

### **Social Integration and Resilience**

Because it affects both mental health outcomes and general well-being, social integration is a crucial component of the refugee experience. Successfully integrating into

their new communities increases the likelihood that refugees will become resilient in the face of hardship and decreases their risk of mental health conditions including anxiety and depression (Baumgartner et al., 2024). Social integration entails creating networks of support that promote emotional health in addition to adjusting to the cultural and social settings. Social integration for Afghan refugee professionals is a multifaceted process that involves both professional and cultural adjustment. Afghan refugees, especially those with advanced degrees or professional qualifications, frequently encounter major obstacles when trying to find work. Research indicates that even with credentials in healthcare, engineering, and education, many Afghan refugees find it difficult to obtain jobs that match their qualifications because their foreign credentials are not recognized and they have few professional networks in the United States (Sifat et al., 2024).

Their psychological anguish and social integration may be impacted by this professional isolation. Similar to this, studies on the integration of Afghan refugees in nations such as the UK and Turkey highlight the difficulties caused by post-displacement stresses, which can obstruct both professional and cultural integration (Kurt et al., 2023; Gladwell et al., 2024). Resilience is crucial in assisting Afghan refugee professionals in overcoming these obstacles, nevertheless. Resilient refugees are better able to handle the pressures they face during resettlement, according to studies. This is frequently achieved through social support, individual coping strategies, and community involvement (Orang et al., 2023). Social support from host communities, family, and other refugees can help mitigate the negative impacts of stress and encourage better psychological adjustment. Maintaining

close community relationships has been demonstrated to greatly enhance mental health outcomes and lessen feelings of loneliness among Afghan refugees (Alemi et al., 2023).

### **Coping Strategies of Afghan Refugee Professionals**

When navigating the psychological and social barriers of relocation, Afghan refugee professionals rely heavily on coping mechanisms. In order to restore their sense of direction and security, refugees have been found to employ a variety of coping mechanisms, including turning to professional networks, religious activities, and social support (Alemi et al., 2023). It can be especially challenging for Afghan refugee professionals to deal with the loss of their former professional identity.

Apart from personal coping mechanisms, community-based solutions emphasizing group resilience have also been demonstrated to be successful. Integration and emotional assistance can be facilitated by programs that link refugees with social groups, cultural brokers, and local leaders. These initiatives can lessen isolation, foster psychological well-being, and increase Afghan refugees' sense of belonging (Orang et al., 2023). Studies that propose the integration of cultural and familial ties to enhance refugee well-being highlight the significance of culturally appropriate mental health interventions (Hosseini et al., 2024).

### **Resilience-Oriented Mental Health Interventions**

Refugees are increasingly being assisted in their integration process through resilience-oriented mental health therapies. Instead of only addressing the trauma and deficiencies connected to the refugee experience, these interventions place an emphasis on the value of strengths, coping mechanisms, and collective support. Research shows

how successfully resilience-based interventions work to help refugees reframe their experiences, better their social integration, and improve their psychological health (Orang et al., 2023). In order to support Afghan refugee professionals' psychological and professional transition, culturally sensitive treatments catered to their particular requirements could be crucial, highlighting the significance of comprehending their distinct cultural environment (Alemi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024).

### **Summary**

This study of the literature has examined the social and psychological difficulties that Afghan refugee professionals have when they are resettled in the United States. The significance of comprehending their coping mechanisms, social integration difficulties, and mental health requirements has been emphasized. By concentrating on the theoretical underpinnings of the Stress Appraisal Model and COR Theory, the study is well-positioned to investigate how Afghan refugee professionals deal with these difficulties. In addition, the review has highlighted the need of culturally sensitive therapies and resilience, highlighting the relevance of community resources and social support in improving Afghan refugees' psychological transition and integrated career.

This study's methodology, which includes the research design, data collection strategies, and analysis procedures, will be covered in the next chapter. In addition to supporting the creation of successful interventions for Afghan refugee professionals, this will guarantee a clear grasp of how the research findings will advance the area of refugee studies.

Cross-case analysis: Comparing themes across participant experiences to identify patterns and similarities.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The methodological framework, research design, and data collection techniques used in this qualitative study examining the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals during resettlement in the United States are described in this chapter. The goal of the study is to gain a better understanding of how Afghan refugee professionals deal with issues related to mental health, psychological distress, cultural adaptation, family duties, and professional integration. This study intends to provide a fuller understanding of their resettlement processes by recording their lived experiences, including the challenges they face, the interpretations they make of these events, and the coping strategies they choose as they start over in a new nation. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), as described by Braun and Clarke (2022), will be the analytical method employed in this investigation.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Research Tradition and Question**

The purpose of this study is to use a qualitative research design to explore, understand, and analyze the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is especially well-suited for examining subjective sensations, feelings, and perceptions and is frequently used to document the complexities of human behavior in its natural setting. This approach makes it easier to gather detailed, descriptive data that offers a profound comprehension of the difficulties Afghan refugee professionals encounter when adjusting to new personal and

professional environments in the US. The use of a qualitative method is justified by the necessity to investigate unique narratives and subjective interpretations. Qualitative research, by concentrating on the viewpoints of participants, provides subtle insights about their social and psychological adaptation processes that are hard to capture using quantitative methods.

The qualitative method will be chosen because it allows for the examination of the subjective experiences of Afghan refugee professionals, including their feelings, individual viewpoints, and the particular challenges they face during resettlement. A thorough analysis of participants' lived realities is necessary to comprehend the intricate relationships between psychological, social, and professional issues, and qualitative research supports this idea. Because they ignore the highly contextualized and unique characteristics of refugee experiences, quantitative approaches—which place an emphasis on numerical data and statistical relationships—are inappropriate for this study.

What are the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States overcoming social and psychological barriers to work and social integration? That is the research question that drives this study. Finding out the particular difficulties, coping techniques, and resilience mechanisms that individuals employ to assimilate into American society is the goal of this inquiry.

To investigate how Afghan refugee professionals perceive and interpret their lived experiences with relocation, identity changes, career adaptation, emotional adjustment, and cultural integration, a qualitative phenomenological study approach will be used. Because it emphasizes subjective meaning-making and places a strong emphasis on

people's voices, perceptions, and interpretations as they express their of generalizing results, this design aims to offer an experienced experiences, phenomenology is appropriate. Instead of generalizing results, this design aims to offer profound understanding of the core of participants' experiences.

The methodological framework that will be used to analyze the data is Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). Because RTA is theoretically adaptable and fits in well with phenomenological research, it was selected to examine the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The researcher can capture the richness and depth of participants' tales by using this method, which places an emphasis on meaning, experience, and psychological-emotional interpretation. Additionally, RTA acknowledges that the subjectivity of the researcher can enhance the understanding of the data and views it as an essential analytical tool rather than a source of bias. Instead of using mechanistic categorization or depending on interrater reliability, it also encourages in-depth, iterative involvement with interview data and lets themes arise intuitively. Overall, by offering a methodical yet adaptable approach to comprehending the complex experiences of participants, RTA closely complies with the study's interpretative objectives.

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), RTA is not a mechanical coding exercise but rather a creative, interpretive, and reactive process based on meaning-making. This method supports the study's goal of examining and interpreting participants' perceptions of the difficulties, adjustments, and changes they have undergone throughout relocation.

While preserving the depth and complexity of participants' actual experiences, RTA allows the researcher to find patterns, connections, and deeper meanings in their tales.

### **Reflexive Thematic Analysis Qualitative Research Rationale**

The Afghan refugee professionals can analyze their own stories and articulate their experiences in their own terms by combining phenomenology and RTA. This design offers a way to investigate how their adaptation processes are shaped by psychological, social, and cultural aspects. By allowing participants to articulate the meanings they ascribe to trauma, relocation, resettlement, and workplace integration, this method facilitates understanding their lived experiences from their own perspectives. Through giving participants' viewpoints first priority, the study effectively conveys the ways in which trauma, relocation, and resettlement impact identity, emotional adjustment, and career paths. Examining how social, cultural, and environmental settings affect participants' psychological difficulties, coping methods, and adaption techniques is another benefit of using RTA. A thorough grasp of coping mechanisms, resilience, and successful integration pathways is also made possible by the reflexive nature of RTA, which allows the researcher to interpret participants' actual experiences in a relevant and nuanced manner. A more thorough investigation of how Afghan refugee professionals comprehend their emotional shifts, career challenges, and well-being maintenance techniques is made possible by this emphasis on meaning-making and interpretation.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher acts as the main tool for gathering and interpreting data in qualitative research, especially in Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). The researcher

classified narratives, identified themes, performed all interviews, and transcribed data. Reflexivity is crucial because Reflexive Thematic Analysis acknowledges that the researcher's perspectives, positionality, cultural background, and lived experiences influence the analytical process. In order to preserve reflexive awareness, the researcher kept a reflexive journal during the data collection and analysis process, recorded feelings, presumptions, and new information following each interview, thought back on her own experiences as an Afghan immigrant who was acquainted with the psychological, linguistic, and cultural dynamics encountered by refugee professionals, and investigated how individual viewpoints could affect interpretation. Without putting prior notions on the data, these reflexive approaches promoted analytical transparency and enhanced comprehension of participants' experiences.

Along with reflexive journaling, I will keep an audit trail, record analytical choices, and engage in continuous self-reflection to make sure that researcher bias does not influence the analytical process. This entails documenting the process of developing codes, choosing themes, and keeping an eye on presumptions at every RTA stage. Transparency, credibility, and the integrity of the theme development are all enhanced by these processes.

Making sure that the data is analyzed carefully and without imposing assumptions. As part of my job, I have to be very reflective in order to take into consideration any biases, assumptions, or prejudices I may have that could affect the research process. Even though I try to be impartial and fair, I am aware that my perspective and background could

influence how the data is interpreted. As I conduct my research, I will keep in mind these possible biases to make sure the analysis is transparent and consistent.

I will list the precise duties and obligations I'll have during the dissertation process. Collecting and evaluating qualitative information from Afghan refugee professionals will be my main responsibility as the researcher. In order to do this, I will interview participants in semi structured interviews, making sure that the questions are open-ended to promote detailed, rich answers. I will be in charge of verbatim transcription of these interviews and making sure that all information is appropriately recorded for analysis.

In keeping with RTA, instead than adhering to a strict coding framework, I will immerse myself in the material by reading transcripts several times, code in an organic and fluid manner, and continuously hone emerging ideas. My responsibilities include deciphering meaning from the dataset and admitting that I actively influenced the final themes.

By getting participants' informed consent and upholding anonymity throughout the project, I will make sure that the research process is morally sound in addition to gathering and analyzing data. I'll continue to pay close attention to the research's reliability and credibility by validating the results utilizing technique like member checks. Even if triangulation is not necessary for RTA, I will increase trustworthiness by being transparent, engaging in reflective dialogue, and providing thorough documentation of analytical decisions (audit trail), making sure that themes accurately represent the opinions of participants.

Throughout the study, I will also practice reflexivity by periodically reviewing my own prejudices and presumptions to make sure the results accurately represent the experiences of the participants. Since my own history and experiences may affect how I understand and engage with the data, they will be taken into account and acknowledged.

I will be in charge of writing and organizing the dissertation in addition to analyzing the data. This will entail presenting the research findings, analyzing their consequences, and talking about how the findings advance the area of refugee studies as a whole. Lastly, I'll make sure that all data and literature sources are properly cited and that my conclusions are communicated in an understandable, thorough, and approachable way. This work will culminate in recommendations for improving support services for Afghan refugees and useful insights into the difficulties experienced by these professionals.

My duties as the researcher will include the previously mentioned duties as well as a number of additional crucial duties to guarantee the integrity and rigor of the dissertation process. A more thorough breakdown of every step I will take during the dissertation process can be found here:

### **Research Design Improvement**

To make sure the study adequately answers the research topic, I will meticulously plan it. Developing a recruitment strategy and improving the participant selection criteria are part of this. In addition, I'll make sure the interview guide and other data gathering tools are in line with the goals of the study. Since Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is being used in this study, I will create the interview guide to encourage rich, in-depth

narrative rather than preplanned or scheduled answers. In line with RTA's emphasis on collecting meaning across the dataset, the guide will promote depth, openness, and flexibility. To assess the instruments' clarity and capacity to extract useful data, I will need to pilot them with a small sample of participants at this time. Additionally, by allowing participants to describe complex experiences without being guided toward predetermined answers, pilot testing will help guarantee that the questions encourage reflexive participation.

### **Recruiting of Participants**

As part of the recruiting process, I will create and disseminate recruitment materials that provide a clear explanation of the goal, methodology, and inclusion criteria of the study. I will make sure that recruiting is accessible and inclusive by working with neighborhood associations and refugee organizations to connect with possible participants. Additionally, I will put in place mechanisms to monitor the hiring procedure, uphold moral principles, and guarantee that study participants are aware of their rights. I will also make sure the sample includes individuals who may differ in age, gender, career, and length of stay in the United States because RTA promotes diversity of meaning and experience. This will allow the analysis to represent a wide range of perspectives.

Semi structured interviews will be scheduled and conducted by me when participants have been gathered, closely following the ethical guidelines established for data collection. I will make certain that the interviews are carried out with dignity and empathy, offering a secure environment for participants to talk about their own

experiences. Depending on the participants' availability and preferences, Zoom audio calls will be used for interviews. In addition, I will be very careful to create an atmosphere that minimizes the possibility of researcher bias and guarantees confidentiality.

Since RTA acknowledges the researcher as an active contributor to meaning-making, I will be mindful of my responses, inquiries, and presumptions during the interviews in order to develop reflexivity. In order to maintain analytical transparency and keep an eye on how my identity and background could affect the interaction and interpretation, I will immediately document these reflections in a reflexive journal following each interview.

Every interview will be completely transcribed, and before coding and theme development begin, the transcripts will be rigorously compared to the original audio to ensure accuracy, consistency, and data integrity.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

I will start the data transcription process as soon as the interviews are over, making sure that the transcriptions from audio recordings are accurate and comprehensive. After that, I'll analyze the data utilizing the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) method. This will entail analyzing the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences. RTA will entail several phases of data familiarization, initial code generation, theme construction and review, theme definition, and final report production using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. Instead of being strict or mechanical, coding will be adaptable, organic, and responsive. Additionally, I will classify and

arrange the data to produce an understandable framework from which I can make pertinent inferences regarding the difficulties encountered by Afghan refugee professionals. To guarantee openness in the construction of findings, I will also maintain an audit trail that details coding choices, theme development, and analytical reflections.

### **Journaling and Reflexivity**

In order to record my own ideas, emotions, and potential biases that can affect the research, I will keep a reflexive journal along the procedure. By keeping this notebook, I will be able to remain self-aware and see how my personal experiences and viewpoints may influence how I understand the data. I will be able to reduce any biases that might occur during data collection and processing and critically assess the possible influence of my own subjectivity on the results by practicing reflexivity. Reflective journaling will also enable me to monitor how my interpretations change over time and how my experience as an Afghan immigrant may influence the development of themes, as the researcher actively participates in meaning-making in RTA. In addition to ensuring that themes accurately represent participant voices, this technique enhances the credibility of the analysis.

### **Maintaining Ethical Integrity**

It is essential to follow ethical rules at every stage of the dissertation process. I will obtain permission from the appropriate institutional review board (IRB) or ethical committee prior to beginning data collection. All participants will receive informed consent paperwork, and I will ensure that they are aware of their rights, including the freedom to withdraw at any moment. Additionally, by securely keeping participant data

and utilizing pseudonyms when publishing findings, I will guarantee the security and anonymity of the information. In addition to informing participants about accessible mental health support resources, any potential harm to participants particularly that connected to emotional discomfort during interviews—will be minimized. All audio files and transcripts will be kept on a password-protected computer, and before coding starts, transcripts will be verified for correctness against recordings. In compliance with the IRB regulations of Walden University, data will be safely stored for three years before being totally erased.

To make sure my study is comprehensive, moral, and significant, I shall undertake a variety of duties during the dissertation process. My methodology will continue to be adaptable and flexible as I interact with study subjects, examine data, and combine my results to make significant contributions to the field of refugee studies. By being proactive and thoughtful throughout the entire process, I hope to generate research that offers insightful information on the difficulties Afghan refugee professionals encounter and can guide future support interventions. In order to produce a rich and reliable interpretation of participants' lived experiences, I will maintain my flexibility throughout all analytical phases, as RTA promotes depth, nuance, and the co-creation of meaning.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection and Protocol**

The study's participants will be professionals who are Afghan refugees who have moved to the United States and work in sophisticated professions like engineering, healthcare, or education. The following are the inclusion criteria:

1. The minimum age requirement for participation is 18.
2. Participants must be Afghan refugees who were relocated in the United States.
3. Participants have to be refugees from Afghanistan who have moved to the US in the past ten years and they must be professionals.

### **Sample**

The study's sample will comprise of ten people. Saturation in qualitative research happens when no new themes, insights, or variations emerge from the data, indicating that more data gathering would produce redundant material. The sample for this study consists of ten participants chosen by purposive sampling, ensuring that individuals who can provide rich, in-depth narratives of their lived experiences are represented. A variety of factors will be used to determine whether saturation has been attained. When replies recur during data analysis, and no new insights emerge, thematic redundancy is considered attained. Comprehensive data coverage will be examined to ensure that the acquired data adequately covers all parts of the research issue while leaving no notable gaps. Maintaining an audit trail, reflexive notes, and member checks to make sure participants' viewpoints are appropriately reflected will improve consistency in interpretation even though Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) does not need

triangulation. Additionally, expert validation via member checks and talks with peers or advisers will aid in determining whether saturation has been met. Given the breadth and interpretive focus of RTA, it is anticipated that a small sample size of 10 participants will be adequate to reach saturation within the constraints of the study. The purposely small sample size enables in-depth interviews and a comprehensive examination of each participant's experiences. This sample size is in line with the epistemological underpinnings of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and qualitative research that emphasizes depth, nuance, and rich meaning-making. Within the confines of a qualitative investigation, this sample size is also feasible in accordance with the goals of qualitative phenomenological research employing Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

### **Instrumentation**

The main method for gathering data for this study will be semi structured interviews. Open-ended interview questions will be designed to encourage participants to express what they have experienced in a manner that reveals how they interpret and make meaning of those experiences. Open-ended interview questions will enable participants to go into great depth about their experiences. The interview guide will be created using the Stress Appraisal Model and the (COR) Theory as theoretical frameworks, making sure that the questions cover the social and psychological issues mentioned in the study question. RTA's emphasis on meaning-making and flexible engagement is in line with the interview guide's flexibility, which permits questions to change throughout the interview based on participant responses.

### **For Researcher-Developed Instruments**

It is critical to include a list of follow-up suggestions to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses if they are too short. Some potential follow-up prompts are:

- Could you tell me more about it?
- How did you feel after going through that experience?
- Could you please give me an example of what you mean?
- What factors do you believe contributed to that situation?
- How did you deal with that challenge?
- How did that affect you?
- Can you recall a specific occasion when you felt this way?
- How has that experience changed your perspective?
- What do you wish had gone differently in that situation?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say on this subject?

These suggestions will assist participants produce rich, thorough responses, allowing for a better comprehension of their experiences. Participants in RTA are assisted in identifying patterns of meaning across the dataset by follow-up prompts that help them elaborate on the meanings they assign to events and circumstances.

The primary research themes will be included in the interview guide, which will be created to encourage candid discussion. Although the questions will be general enough to let participants freely share their experiences, they will also touch on particular topics including social integration, psychological difficulties, coping mechanisms, and professional identity. The interview guide will be developed to promote open

communication and will incorporate the main study issues. While the questions will be broad enough to allow participants to openly discuss what they have experienced, they will additionally touch on specific subjects including professional identity, coping strategies, psychological challenges, and social integration.

The interview questions will motivate participants to explain how they comprehend, interpret, and make sense of these experiences in order to align with RTA. This will support the development of shared themes instead of individual phenomenological accounts. Examples of inquiries could be:

- Could you explain how you found employment in the United States after moving here?
- Have you encountered any psychological or social difficulties acclimating to living here?
- How do you handle the challenges you face in your job and daily life?

These inquiries are used in RTA to investigate the meaning patterns that participants attribute to their experiences, hence facilitating the development of themes throughout the entire dataset.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I'll use a variety of online forums and platforms that cater to refugee populations, in addition to professional networks and Afghan refugee community centers, to find volunteers. Social media groups devoted to Afghan refugees in the United States are one example of a specific internet forum for refugees. These forums are great ways to connect

with possible participants because they frequently conduct conversations and offer resources for refugees.

In order to provide accessibility for all possible participants, I will create and distribute recruitment brochures in both Dari and English to aid in outreach. These pamphlets will include information about the study's objectives, participant expectations, and the advantages of taking part. Potential participants will get informed consent papers outlining the study in greater detail after expressing interest, guaranteeing that they are fully aware of their rights and that participation is optional. Once the informed consent documents have been signed, I will schedule an interview time that works for the participant.

Semi structured interviews, which will be performed using a flexible guide intended to examine the participants' lived experiences, will be the main method of data gathering. In keeping with the meaning-centered approach of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), the guide will be made to encourage participants to explain how they perceive and comprehend their experiences rather than eliciting in-depth phenomenological accounts. In keeping with the meaning-centered approach of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), the guide will be made to encourage participants to explain how they perceive and comprehend their experiences rather than eliciting in-depth phenomenological accounts. The interviews or video conferencing systems (like Zoom or Skype) can be used, depending on the participant's preference. I'll see to it that these platforms are practical for the participants and that the interviews are conducted in a setting that makes them feel secure enough to talk about their experiences.

To guarantee that I accurately capture the participant's comments, I will audio record every interview with their permission. To fully capture the richness and complexity of the participants' stories, these recordings will then be verbatim transcribed for study. To facilitate a thorough examination of participants' interpretations and meanings throughout the dataset, recordings will be verbatim transcribed. To protect participant confidentiality and anonymity, the transcription process will be conducted with the highest care, and transcripts will be safely archived.

By using these thorough recruitment, engagement, and data collection techniques, I hope to obtain deep, insightful information about the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals navigating the resettlement and integration process in the United States. A fundamental component of RTA, these processes facilitate the formation of common patterns of meaning. Participant recruiting, data collection, and analysis will all be carried out with rigor and attention to detail thanks to the study's methodical, step-by-step methodology. There will be more steps in this process, which are listed below.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

#### **Platforms for Employment**

I'll use internet discussion boards and community platforms that cater to refugee communities to find volunteers. These channels include websites and social media groups where Afghan refugees regularly interact and exchange resources. Reddit discussions, local refugee support networks, and facebook groups devoted to Afghan refugees are a few examples of these sites. I will also make advantage of professional networks belonging to Afghan refugees, such LinkedIn or specialized job placement organizations

that cater to refugee populations. Additionally, since Afghan refugees frequently congregate in local Afghan refugee community centers for social and professional support, I will make contact with them.

Since this study makes use of flexible thematic analysis (RTA), recruitment will place more emphasis on finding a diverse group of participants who can contribute a range of viewpoints, assisting in the identification of patterns of meaning throughout the dataset rather than pursuing individual depth as in IPA.

### **Cooperation With Local leaders**

I will work with community leaders—reliable people who have built relationships with the target population—to improve recruiting efforts and guarantee trust within the refugee community. These leaders will assist with outreach by informing their networks about the study. Additionally, they might offer testimonies regarding the goal of the study, which will promote involvement.

In order to guarantee that prospective volunteers comprehend the study and its objectives, I will create recruitment pamphlets in both Dari and English. The booklets will provide a succinct overview of the study, an explanation of the requirements for participation, and a list of possible advantages of taking part. They will also provide contact details in case of queries or concerns. In addition to being distributed online (through the previously stated forums), the pamphlets will also be displayed in public places including cultural centers,

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will provide a succinct overview of the study, an explanation of the requirements for participation, and a list of possible advantages of taking part. They will also provide contact details in case of queries or concerns. In addition to being distributed online (through the previously stated forums), the pamphlets will also be displayed in public places including cultural centers, local mosques, and refugee community centers.

Additionally, the recruitment materials will clarify that the study's focus is on participants' interpretations of their experiences, which aligns with RTA's interpretive and flexible nature.

### **Interview Scheduling**

Following their signature on the informed consent form, participants will be contacted to arrange a time for an interview. Since many refugee professionals may work long hours or have family responsibilities, I will make sure that scheduling is flexible enough to fit participants' work and personal schedules. There will be a question on whether the interview should take place in person or via video conference (e.g., Zoom, Skype, or another platform of their choice). Video conferencing will often be the preferable method. According to RTA, interviews will be conducted so that participants are encouraged to share their interpretations, viewpoints, and meanings rather than concentrating only on in-depth accounts of their lived experiences.

### **How to Conduct Semistructured Interviews**

Semistructured interviews will allow me to explore themes that come up throughout the talk while still using a preplanned list of open-ended questions. By ensuring that the interviews are directed but not constrained, the participant will be able

to express their experiences in their own terms. Key subjects that will be covered in the interview are:

- The experience of the participant after moving to the United States.
- They have faced social and psychological obstacles.
- Obstacles and achievements in professional integration
- The coping mechanisms they have employed
- How people view themselves and their feeling of place
- Community and support networks' function in their process of integration

Among the sample inquiries are:

- Could you explain your experience relocating to the United States and seeking work?
- How difficult has it been for you to adapt to American professional settings and cultural norms?
- In what ways do you manage stress or loneliness associated with your relocation?

The length of the interview will depend on the participant's availability and willingness to contribute, but it usually lasts 45 to an hour. I'll make sure to establish a good relationship with interviewees at the outset so they feel at ease enough to talk openly about their experiences. Participants will be encouraged to articulate the meanings they attribute to these experiences through interview questions in order to support RTA. This will enable the development of common themes among participants.

### **Interview Recording and Transcription**

Every interview will be audio recorded with the applicant's permission to guarantee that their answers are appropriately recorded. I'll make use of top-notch audio recording gear to ensure reliable and clear recordings. In order to be recorded for the study, participants must give their consent. Since accurate data collection and analysis depend on voice recording, those who do not want to be recorded will be disqualified. Note-taking by itself would not offer enough detail for a thorough and insightful analysis. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' names and identities. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) requires recording because verbatim data enables an open, thorough, and meaning-focused analysis of the complete dataset.

Following the interview, I will transcribe the recordings verbatim, which means that every word and pause will be captured precisely as it was said. I'll help with the procedure by using expert transcribing software, which guarantees precision and effectiveness. Before analysis, all identifying information will be eliminated or changed, and the transcriptions will be anonymized to preserve participant privacy. In RTA, verbatim transcription facilitates close interaction with the data and the creation of codes and themes that represent the meanings and interpretations of participants.

### **Data Management and Storage**

Both the transcriptions and the interview recordings will be securely held in reserve on password-protected devices and backed up on a protected server. The researcher will be the only one with access to these files. All personally identifying information will be kept private, and analysis will only employ de-identified data. The

study will not include personal identifiers (such names or localities) if it calls for any publication of the results. These methods are in line with RTA, which calls for transparent and moral data handling throughout the analysis process.

### **Postinterview Evaluation and Monitoring**

Data collection and analysis will start as soon as the interviews are finished in order to evaluate saturation as the interviews go on. After every interview, I will go over the transcript again and become acquainted with it. I will carefully go over each participant's story in order to find significant trends in the data. The identification of emerging themes and trends will be made possible by this early engagement with the data, which will help determine when saturation is achieved. To find important insights and recurrent motifs related to the research problem, a coding process will be initiated. By using an iterative approach, data collecting is kept responsive and intentional, enabling adjustments as necessary to gain a thorough grasp of participants' experiences. Due to the use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) in the project, early data engagement will concentrate on finding prospective themes, initial codes, and patterns of meaning among participants. Instead of using a strict or prescriptive analytical framework, RTA stresses a reflexive, flexible approach to meaning-making across the information, enabling the researcher to actively interpret and form themes.

I will start the data analysis process. Multiple readings of the data will be part of the familiarization process, along with active reflection on the meanings participants assign to their experiences. I'll get the data analysis going. In line with reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), I will start by familiarizing myself with the interview transcripts and

attentively reading them to understand each participant's story. After that, I'll start a coding process to look for recurring themes and patterns in the responses that relate to the inquiry. Coding will adhere to the RTA guidelines of Braun & Clarck and Be flexible, organic and iterative. Through an interpretive process that acknowledges the researcher's active role in meaning-making, themes will be developed. In order to find recurrent themes and patterns in the responses that pertain to the study issue, I will next begin a coding procedure.

In order to verify the reliability of the results, I will perform member checking, which is sharing initial findings with a selection of participants to make sure their experiences have been fairly represented. Peer debriefing will also be employed, in which colleagues or specialists in qualitative research offer input on the analytic procedure and results. Although RTA relies more heavily on flexibility, analytical transparency, and an audit trail to support the themes' credibility, member checking and peer debriefing can be used.

I will give participants access to resources for mental health services if they express a need for more assistance or feel emotionally distressed during the interview process. These resources will be distributed both during the interview and at the conclusion of the study to guarantee that participants receive the right kind of assistance all the way through the research procedure.

### **Study Conclusion**

The Participants will get gratitude at the end of the study for their time and significant contributions. They will receive a summary of the findings if they show

interest in them. Participants will have the chance to see how their viewpoints added to a more comprehensive knowledge of the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the US. In order to produce comprehensive and meaningful data regarding the social and psychological difficulties Afghan refugee professionals face during resettlement, the project will carefully and ethically recruit participants, gather data, and analyze that data. Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), the study will emphasize patterns of meaning among participants' perspectives and offer vital insights into their adjustment, adaption, and professional integration in the U.S.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) method will be used for the data analysis. RTA recognizes the active, reflective role of the researcher in theme development and places emphasis on finding patterns of meaning throughout the dataset.

The phases will entail becoming acquainted with the data, recognizing themes, and interpreting the significance of these experiences while paying attention to the context and personal perspective of each participant. Getting to know the data, creating preliminary codes, seeing meaning patterns, and creating themes that capture important facets of participants' experiences in their social and resettlement environments are the steps that will be included.

Individual "lived experience" interpretation in the phenomenological sense is not the goal of RTA; rather, it emphasizes a flexible, meaning-focused analysis that identifies

both common and unique patterns among participant stories. The steps listed below will be part of the analytical process:

Reading the transcripts once and then again: Become acquainted with the content and immerse yourself in the facts. At this point, the researcher can interact closely with the data and start recording initial thoughts, impressions, and coding opportunities.

### **Themes**

Finding important statements and recurrent themes associated with the study issue through the use of a coding method. This procedure will draw attention to significant aspects of the psychological and social difficulties that Afghan refugee professionals encounter in the US. Interpreting how the found patterns link to the research topic and the study's theoretical frameworks—such as the Stress Appraisal Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory—will be the task of theme development.

The data analysis for this study will be guided by the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) developed by Braun and Clarke. Rather of examining each participant's experience through a phenomenological lens, RTA concentrates on finding significant patterns within their experiences. Especially when those experiences are connected to important life events or changes. With an emphasis on the psychological, social, and professional aspects of their experiences, the aim of this study is to comprehend how Afghan refugee professionals in the United States perceive the difficulties they face during resettlement.

To use RTA to evaluate the data, the following steps will be taken:

### **Examining the Transcripts and Getting Lost in the Data**

To properly understand the information, the first step in the RTA process is to read the interview transcripts multiple times. I'll begin by reading each transcript once to get a general idea of the participant's narrative. I will then carefully go over the transcript again, capturing early thoughts, background information, and significant components that could guide subsequent theme and coding development, and making sure I don't miss any crucial facts require this level of data immersion. On the transcripts' margins, I will annotate, emphasizing noteworthy quotes and first impressions that seem pertinent to the study subject.

### **Finding Important Phrases and Themes**

The next step I'll do after thoroughly reading the transcripts is to pinpoint significant quotes and major themes that show up in the information. As an Afghan refugee resettling in the United States, I'll go over the transcripts using a coding system to highlight pertinent ideas, observations, and experiences that participants provided. Statements about social isolation, professional integration, cultural adaptability, or mental health concerns may be among them.

Then, by combining similar concepts, I will arrange these important assertions into more general themes. For instance, topics like "coping mechanisms for mental health stressors," "experiences of cultural dislocation," or "challenges in professional recognition" may surface. In order to focus on recurrent patterns in the data and structure the research, this theme organization is essential.

### **Creating Summaries That Are Interpretive**

Interpreting how the codes come together to form larger themes that effectively answer the study question will be the next step. In this stage, I will combine the concepts into stories that make sense and represent the relationship between the study's theoretical frameworks and the patterns found in participant testimonies. The study's theoretical frameworks, including the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Stress Appraisal Model, are connected to the themes in order to expand a stronger understanding of how participants evaluate and manage the social and psychological challenges they encounter.

For instance, I would examine how a participant's discussion of feeling overpowered by cultural differences at work relates to the stress appraisal model (i.e., how they view the situation and its effect on their mental health) and how they use particular coping mechanisms (as outlined in COR theory). This stage will also entail analyzing how the experiences of the person relate to more general trends seen in the sample.

### **Examining Individual and Collective Storytelling**

RTA enables the analysis to identify significant parallels and discrepancies in the experiences of participants by supporting the examination of both individual reports and common patterns throughout the dataset. I will also search for trends throughout all of the interviews. In the Afghan refugee professional community, this will enable me to find shared experiences or differing viewpoints. The stories of each person will be respected, but I will also try to identify recurring themes in the group as a whole. Putting

Interpretations in Writing, Overview of the RTA Processes to Be Followed in This Study  
 rereading transcripts to become fully immersed in the information and finding significant codes in the dataset.

Creating interpretive summaries that relate theoretical frameworks to different issues.

Examining personal and collective accounts to find both distinctive and commonalities.

Putting the results in writing while making sure that interpretations are based on participant opinions and theoretical understanding. Locating important codes inside the dataset., I will guarantee that the analysis is comprehensive, introspective, and accurate to the lived experiences of the Afghan refugee professionals involved in the research.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness and Credibility**

A qualitative study's credibility and dependability are essential for guaranteeing the validity and reliability of its conclusions. The term "trustworthiness" in qualitative research refers to the precision and genuineness of the research procedure, guaranteeing that the data accurately captures the experiences of the participants and that the data interpretation is impartial and open. The main concerns of trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability—will be addressed in this study using a variety of tactics. Since the study now employs Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), being trustworthy will entail engaging in continuous reflexivity during data analysis, recording analytical conclusions, and exhibiting transparency in the coding and theme-development process. In order to make sure that my interpretations are correct and that their experiences are accurately reflected, I will give my early findings to a subset of participants after the data has been examined. This process is known as member checking

and triangulation. Through this method, I will be able to improve my findings and make sure the analysis is in line with the opinions of the participants. To make sure the conclusions from the research are reliable and consistent, I will also employ triangulation to validate the findings by contrasting the interview data with previously published works. In keeping with RTA, I will also utilize reflexive journaling to record my analytical thoughts and to make sure that the way themes are developed is transparent.

Writing the Dissertation and arranging It: Writing and arranging the dissertation will be a big part of my job. Drafting the paper's introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion are all part of this. I will make sure that every piece makes sense and flows together as I write, creating a coherent story that explains the study methodology and findings. In order to deliver a coherent and well-structured argument that emphasizes the contributions of my study to the area, I will edit and polish my writing during this phase.

### ***Presentation and Distribution***

After finishing the dissertation, I will be ready to share the results with appropriate audiences, such as scholarly conferences, refugee assistance organizations, or neighborhood associations. I'll also think about sharing the results via scholarly publications or neighborhood seminars to make sure the study's findings can be applied to change refugee assistance initiatives and regulations. To ensure that the research benefits the Afghan refugee groups, I will also look into ways to communicate the results with them.

### ***Credibility***

The study will employ triangulation by contrasting interview data with the body of current literature in order to guarantee the validity of the results. Additionally, to make sure that participants' experiences are appropriately reflected, member checks will be carried out by sharing preliminary findings with them. I will compare and contrast the interview data with previous research using triangulation as a technique to increase the study's credibility. Cross-referencing data from several sources enables triangulation to validate findings and guarantee that they are not only representative of one viewpoint or set of circumstances. I will be able to verify the findings' consistency and dependability by incorporating recent research into the analysis, which will increase the study's validity. Additionally, in order to make sure that participants' experiences have been fairly represented, I will perform member checks by discussing preliminary findings with them. In addition to adding credibility, this phase guarantees that participants have a say in confirming how their own tales are interpreted, enabling any misconceptions or misinterpretations to be cleared up early on. Credibility will also be reinforced by transparent documentation of coding and theme development, as well as by reflexive involvement to elucidate the analytical decision-making process, since the study now employs Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA).

### ***Transferability***

The in-depth accounts of participants' experiences will offer a deep, contextual understanding that might be applicable to other refugee groups in other settings, despite the small sample size. The results are not intended to apply to all Afghan refugees,

though. The study is limited to a small sample of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States, but the contextualized, in-depth interviews will provide important insights that might be relevant to other refugee groups in comparable situations. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the findings should not be extrapolated beyond the sample and are not meant to be generally applicable to all Afghan refugees. Detailed and extensive descriptions of the participants' experiences and the study's background will be provided to improve transferability. Other practitioners or researchers in various situations will be able to evaluate the findings' relevance to their own work or populations thanks to this degree of information. Offering a comprehensive grasp of the participants' lived experiences that can guide future research or interventions is the aim, not extrapolating the results. In RTA, transferability is enhanced by giving readers thorough, in-depth explanations of the data and analytical background so they can assess how well the results translate to different contexts.

### ***Reliability***

The study will remain reliable by meticulously recording the whole research procedure, including the gathering, processing, and interpretation of data. The procedures followed during the study will be reviewed and verified by others thanks to the audit trail that will be kept. The consistency and dependability of the research process are referred to as reliability in qualitative research. I'm going to keep a thorough audit trail to make sure this study is reliable. From participant recruiting to data collection, analysis, and interpretation, every stage of the study process must be painstakingly documented. I will provide transparency by documenting the research process with thorough notes and

recordings, allowing others to examine and confirm the methods used during the study.

This will assist guarantee that the findings are consistent and can be linked to the original data, which is crucial for verifying the validity of the research. Reliability (also known as "dependability") will be improved in accordance with RTA by recording reflexive choices and illustrating how themes changed over the course of the analysis.

### ***Confirmability***

Transparency shall be upheld during the whole study process, including the gathering, processing, and interpretation of data. Any biases or personal influences will be recognized and eliminated, and reflexivity will be stressed. Making sure that the study's conclusions are shaped by the experiences of the participants rather than the prejudices, presumptions, or preferences of the researcher is the main goal of confirmability. By regularly considering my part in the research process and being conscious of any potential biases that can affect the interpretation of the findings, I will practice reflexivity in order to increase confirmability. I acknowledge that my personal experiences and background may influence my analysis, so I will record my ideas, judgments, and reflections throughout the study. By preserving openness about the analysis and interpretation of the data, I will reduce the possibility that my own prejudice would distort the results and make sure that the interpretations are based on the opinions and experiences of the participants. Because RTA places a strong emphasis on reflexivity, I will make sure that my assumptions, positionality, and analytical decisions are transparent and confirmable by documenting how they affect theme development.

The reliability and trustworthiness of this study will be fully handled using these techniques: triangulation, member checks, rich description provision for transferability, audit trail maintenance for reliability, and reflexivity for confirmability. These tactics will guarantee the validity and significance of the study findings as well as a transparent, rigorous, and ethically sound research process. These techniques support the tenets of Reflexive Thematic Analysis and guarantee that the analytical procedure stays open, thorough, and based on participant narratives.

### **Procedures for Ethics**

An important part of this research will be ethical issues. Every participant will be made aware of the goals, methods, and any dangers of the study, and participation will be entirely voluntary. Participant data will be anonymized to preserve anonymity and get informed permission. There will be no consequences if participants decide to leave the study at any point. In the event that participants feel distressed throughout the interview process, they will also be provided with resources for mental health care.

Ethical issues are crucial in qualitative research, particularly when interacting with vulnerable groups like refugee professionals. Informed consent and participant stress are two important ethical issues that this study will address.

### ***Informed Consent***

Making sure that participants understand their rights, the goal of the study, and any possible dangers or discomforts they might encounter is crucial to obtaining their informed consent. A comprehensive informed consent form detailing the study's goals, the procedures involved, and the anticipated length of the interviews will be provided to

each participant prior to any data collection. Participants will be made fully aware on this form that participation is entirely voluntary and that they are free to leave the study at any moment without facing any repercussions. Additionally, participants will be told that their identities will be safeguarded throughout the study by anonymizing and treating their personal information with secrecy. Participants will confirm that they have read and understand these terms and consent to participate in the study by signing the consent form.

### ***Participant Stress***

Participants in this study have gone through a lot of trauma and upheaval, including the relocation and resettlement procedures, thus talking about their experiences could cause them to feel emotionally or psychologically distressed during the interviews. To safeguard participants' well-being, this possible stress must be addressed. Participants will be made aware of the purpose of the study during the recruitment process, and they will have the choice to withdraw from it if they are uncomfortable. In order to make participants feel at ease discussing their experiences, I will also establish a sympathetic and encouraging atmosphere throughout the interviews. When a participant exhibits signs of emotional pain or upset, I will halt the interview and give them the choice to continue or end it. Furthermore, I will furnish participants with resources for mental health assistance, such as the contact details of counselors or nearby refugee support organizations. Participants will be given the contact details of local refugee support groups and counselors, for instance. The Refugee Health Program is one such instance, providing free counseling services to immigrants and refugees via a network of

neighborhood support organizations. To make it simpler for participants to get help if they are experiencing emotional distress, the contact information for these services will be provided to them in both Dari and English. This proactive strategy will support participants' well-being throughout and after the trial by enabling them to obtain essential care without facing financial obstacles.

This will make it easier to guarantee that they can get expert support if necessary. The informed consent form will also contain a clause stating that participants are welcome to get in touch with the researcher if they feel distressed following the interview. In an effort to reduce harm and provide a humane method of gathering data, I will be proactive regarding participant stress and provide relevant resources.

In conclusion, the ethical issues of participant stress and informed consent will be resolved by means of open communication, the supply of tools and assistance, and a dedication to the welfare of participants at every stage of the study. Following these ethical guidelines will guarantee that participants' rights are upheld and that their safety and mental well-being are given top priority.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, the research concept and methodology for investigating the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the United States were described. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), which directs the qualitative design, provides an adaptable and methodical framework for analyzing the difficulties encountered by Afghan refugee professionals and finding significant trends in their narratives. Through the use of strict protocols for participant selection, data collecting, and analysis, this

research seeks to produce reliable and perceptive results that will advance the area of refugee studies and guide the creation of support interventions for Afghan refugee professionals.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Result

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings from the data analysis for this qualitative phenomenological investigation into the real-life experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the US. The data collecting and analysis methodologies, participant demographics, and emerging themes that characterize the participants' experiences with social and psychological challenges of integration are all thoroughly described in this chapter. The results are arranged according to the main study question:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the U.S. navigating social and psychological obstacles in their employment and integration into society?

The data collection, preparation, and analysis processes, as well as the findings from participant interviews, are presented in this chapter. The goal of the analysis was to pinpoint key themes that encapsulated their real-life experiences.

### **Changes and Updates to Information from Chapters 1–3**

The methods described in Chapter 3 for data collection, participant selection, and research design remained unchanged. Following the authorized Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules, every procedure was carried out. The study fully complied with the ethical guidelines outlined in the IRB-approved Ethics Self-Check, which include participant anonymity, email consent, minimal safety precautions, and secure data keeping. Chapter 3 underwent minor editing changes to make it consistent with the Ethics Self-Check that was approved by the IRB. These included making it clear

that consent was obtained via email, and that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could skip any question or withdraw at any time, that data was stored securely on encrypted devices that required a password, and that all materials would be destroyed after three years. Additionally, the data collection description was revised to make it clear that all interviews were done through Zoom with audio-only recording and that all correspondence took place via email, including invitations, scheduling, and consent. These revisions guarantee that Chapter 3 appropriately depicts the methods used throughout the research.

### **Raw Data Preparation for Analysis Data Gathering Overview**

Examining the lived experiences of Afghan refugee professionals living in the US as they deal with the psychological and social obstacles of integration was the aim of this qualitative phenomenological study. In order to extract the main points of the lived experiences, interviews were conducted in order to gather detailed, rich descriptions that could be subjected to theme analysis. Semistructured, one-on-one interviews were used to collect data, allowing volunteers to personally and professionally express their experiences adjusting to new situations.

Virtual semistructured interviews were performed with Afghan refugee professionals who had relocated to United states. Before the interview started, permission to record the interview Recorded. With a median length of 19 minutes, each participant engaged in a single interview session that lasted between 13 to 26 minutes. To promote conversation, the interviews took place in a private, peaceful setting using Zoom. The

fact that participation was entirely voluntary and the fact that they might leave the study at any moment was emphasized to participants.

Using Zoom's transcription capability, the interviews were audio captured and automatically transcribed. Then after attentively listening to the audio recordings while performing any necessary manual adjustments, each transcript was examined for accuracy. For instance, by consulting the original audio, unusual mistakes like Participant incorrectness or inaudible words were fixed. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality during the study, each participant was given a code. Every transcript was cleared of any identifying information. During data collection one interview in this study was done in Dari and had to be translated into English by hand. The researcher translated the data from Dari to English and the answers from the subjects were carefully translated by hand so that the original meaning, context, and emotional nuance were kept. It was very important to take this step to keep the data clean and make sure that the analysis correctly captured the essence of the participant's experience. The reason the researcher did the translation is because she speaks both languages and understands both ethnic settings. To improve accuracy and dependability, the translated transcripts were then read more than once, and any choices made during translation were noted. The researcher kept all the electronic recordings and transcripts on a laptop that was password-protected. Following the study's conclusion, all data will be safely stored for three years before being deleted in compliance with Walden University's data retention guidelines.

**Table 1***Interview Log*

Participant	Setting	Date	Duration
Participant 1	Zoom	8/4/2025	23 minutes
Participant 2	Zoom	8/19/2025	23 minutes
Participant 3	Zoom	8/19/2025	18 minutes
Participant 4	Zoom	8/19/2025	26 minutes
Participant 5	Zoom	9/11/2025	16 minutes
Participant 6	Zoom	9/19/2025	16 minutes
Participant 7	Zoom	9/26/2025	23 minutes
Participant 8	Zoom	9/27/2025	13 minutes
Participant 9	Zoom	9/29/2025	17 minutes
Participant 10	Zoom	10/4/2025	16 minutes

Semistructured interviews were used in this study to investigate participants' lived experiences using a phenomenological method. An inductive reasoning approach also used to ensure methodological integrity and contextual rigor, the interview data were coded and organized in MAXQDA. The reflexive thematic analysis was used which is developed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

### **Braun and Clarke Six Steps**

#### **Step 1: Familiarity With Data**

The first step was reading each interview transcript in-depth and repeatedly in the process of analysis. Multiple immersions allowed for the absorption and documentation of subtle patterns emotional expressions, and thematically rich details. Approaching stories in accordance with the phenomenological goal with openness while acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role, personal emotions and preconceptions were reflexively acknowledged in memoranda (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reviewing the interview transcripts several times over was an essential step in the familiarization

process. A greater comprehension of the nuanced details, psychological themes, and contextual richness ingrained in each participant's story was made possible by this iterative immersion. This kind of involvement is consistent with phenomenological goals, which are to approach the facts objectively while reflexively recognizing the investigator's interpretive duty and any prejudices that may exist.

### **Step 2: Creating Codes**

Both the latent (conceptual) and manifest (semantic) meanings in participant tales were captured via codes developed in MAXQDA with an inductive approach.

Participants' reported lived experience was authentic and nuanced, as evidenced by the attention paid to narrative, linguistic, and philosophical observations. Reflexive TA acknowledges that researcher subjectivity is inevitable; codes were carefully allocated to important parts, and interpretation choices were recorded in reflexive notes (Clarke and Braun, 2022). The table below presents an example of an initial code, accompanied by some of participants and sample quotes that substantiate the code.

**Table 2***Initial Codes Example*

Initial code	Participants	Example quotes
Difficulty finding job in the field	7	“I work you know just in a small business in a position, and after a while I got higher position.”
	8	“What was your wish? You cannot approach those and thing that you have in your mind. So it's really challengeable for me as a professional person.”
	5	“When I came first, I didn't know anybody, and it was really hard for me to navigate the jobs around.”

**Step 3: Developing and Assessing Themes**

Searching for Themes is the third step in Braun and Clarke's six-step process for thematic analysis. The codes were arranged into possible themes. Each of the themes was understood. Themes were refined and examined for analytical clarity while taking theoretical background and other interpretations into account. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), the method required that the researcher's primary function in creating and reporting themes be recognized as an indicator of significance rather than bias. The tools provided by MAXQDA allow for clear documentation of theme creation and coding.

To make sure that each topic accurately reflected in the participants' experiences, the coded data had to be reviewed several times. In line with the analytical strategy described in Chapter 3, the theme development process was an iterative, reflective cycle.

After transcripts were coded in MAXQDA, codes were first grouped into initial candidate themes by looking for patterns and conceptual connections.

In this step of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis usually themes are created. After the steps of coding and familiarizing with the data in more detail. In this third step, all the initial codes that were created by the data are put together and organized into larger patterns of meaning, or candidate themes, that encompass important parts of the participants' daily experiences. Using MAXQDA, the transcripts were coded as planned. By looking for patterns, connections, and similarities that fit with the research questions and theoretical theories described in Chapter 3, these codes were assembled. For instance, theme 6 called “Rebuilding professional identity and adapting to the American workforce” was made up of subthemes. For instance, for one of the subthemes was, “Emotional and Confidence Struggles in the Workplace,” and one of the codes for this subtheme was “Lack of capability/confidence felt” and some of the quotes for this code were “I think at my first job, they underestimated me a lot of the times, but because they didn't think I was capable of doing certain things” (Participant 4 [P4]) and “In America, there is still some doubt or suggestion in some companies about the value of foreign experiences” (P1).

An example of a single theme, the code that goes with it, and the related subtheme are shown in Table 3. This format shows how the theme was developed through the organization and analysis of participant responses.

**Table 3***Developing Themes Example*

Theme	Subtheme	Example code	Example of quotes
Rebuilding professional identity and adapting to the American workforce	Emotional and confidence struggles in the workplace	Lack of capability/confidence felt	<p>“I think at my first job, they underestimated me a lot of the times, but because they didn't think I was capable of doing certain things.” (P4)</p> <p>“In America, there is still some doubt or suggestion in some companies about the value of foreign experiences.” (P1)</p>

The themes were developed as follows: I started by going over the participant narratives and creating preliminary meaning clusters out of comparable statements and experiences. The patterns found in these clusters reflected important facets of the participants' actual experiences. Every topic emerged from a collection of connected concepts that clarified a key experience that all participants had in common. By elucidating how participants evaluated stress and how resource gains or losses affected their experiences, the Stress Appraisal Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory functioned as guiding frameworks that aided in the interpretation of these

patterns. The construction of the final themes was informed and improved by the incorporation of participant tales with these theoretical frameworks.

Within the MAXQDA the theme formation was helped by reflective memos and thorough documentation. To make sure that decision about code grouping and theme formation were clear. During this time, the researcher was aware of her role as an interpreter, believing that themes are actively created rather than passively found. The approach was meant to keep the depth and variety of the participants' stories while also making them easier to understand by grouping them into useful themes that could then be used for further analysis and improvement.

#### **Step 4: Reviewing the Themes**

After initial themes were created and evaluated, the next step in Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis is reviewing and refining themes to make sure they truly reflect the data and the overall story that rises from the participants' stories. Later, each theme was thoroughly examined over again to make sure it made sense, was consistent, and stood out. Read again coded excerpts and texts to make sure that the information contained in each theme validated its theoretical significance and that themes could be clearly distinguished from each other.

When overlap or duplication was found, themes that were similar were merged, and themes that weren't backed by enough evidence were improved. This reviewing process made sure that each theme correctly reflected the real-life experiences of professionals working with Afghan refugees and answered the research question of the

study. Making the themes more specific also improved the rigorous methodology of the research, which made the results more credible and trustworthy.

### **Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

It was time to define and name each theme so that its main idea could be communicated clearly and briefly. The main idea behind each theme and the specific part of the participants' experiences it showed were examined. Each theme's scope and limits were explained in great detail in its description, which made sure that the themes were separate but connected. The following theme, "Negotiating Afghan Identity and Stereotype in the Workplace," is a great example of Braun and Clarke's Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes. This step is about making it clear what each theme means and the way it captures a certain part of the experiences of the people. The example introduces the main idea of the theme, which is how Afghan refugee professionals deal with their identity and discrimination at work, and then it outlines the theme's boundaries via three subthemes. Every subtheme makes the main theme's scope clearer by showing how people deal with bias and find their place in the group in different ways. The short, clear title also says what the theme is all about, showing how clear names and thorough explanations make the data meaning make sense. The themes and subthemes that were found via thematic analysis are listed below. All of them together show the full range of trends, problems, and meanings that people in the study talked about.

All the themes, their related subthemes, and some of participant quotes that serve as examples are shown in Table 4. The social and psychological difficulties encountered

during work and integration are highlighted in this table, which offers a thorough summary of the categorization and analysis of participant experiences.

**Table 4***Themes, Subthemes, and Quotes From Participants*

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
Theme 1: Early relocation challenges and obstacles to social and professional integration	Subtheme 1: Communication and resources barriers during early resettlement	“The other issue was about the language barrier to finding the job. This is a big issue.” (P8)
	Subtheme 2: Cultural misunderstanding and systemic inequality	“There are certain things that we interpret differently than Americans. On those issues, I learned that difficult way, because when I said something, for example, thumbs up. It’s a good thing in America. Thumbs up in my country is not a good thing. So, I had to learn all those things. By making mistake and seeing other people are laughing.” (p1)
	Subtheme 3: Positive beginning Followed by adjustment challenges	“We didn't see any problems at that time, but over time, you will understand the problems yourself, which are resettlement problems. We started life from scratch” (P1)
	Subtheme 4: Challenges with recognition of foreign education and experiences	“They value the internal experience. They don't value your background, your experience.” (P8)
	Subtheme 5: Navigating early relocation and employment challenges without guidance	“I had to start from somewhere to you know, pay my bills and all that stuff. At the beginning, it

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
	Subtheme 6: Overcoming early hardship community and agency support	<p>was hard because I was never used to this kind of work that I started at the beginning. But by passing of the time, I got used to it, and then navigate around, Knowing other people” (P5)</p> <p>“I participate in many job fairs events, but they were useless for us. Because what they're looking for we are not suitable for that. what we are looking for, they don't accept us, or they don't offer us. I think for Afghans, they should establish a different structure and unfortunately, in most of the organization. They should hire, like, a qualified Afghans or someone from the related country. At least they know about the system, about the culture, and about the consequences.” (P8)</p>
Theme 2: Getting around American workplace customs and cultural expectations	Subtheme 1: Workplace norms and cultural differences	<p>“You asked a very important question. Adapting to the professional environment and work culture in America is one of the main challenges for refugees for example, when I started working, my manager expected me to be fast and clear. I thought that if I made a mistake, I would have to admit it.” (P1)</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
	Subtheme 2: Support from prior experience and Afghan community networks	“It's different for us, as a professional who came to this country. It's easy to be adjusted, because you already know about the systems, and We work back home with people from here, and so we already know about the cultures, about the systems.” (P8)
Theme 3: Stress reduction and psychological adjustment during resettlement	Subtheme 1: Coping and distraction strategies	“Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience, even for those who are successful professionally and personally. First, it's very difficult. We understand that relocation is a psychological shock even at the best of times. But we set goals for ourselves, we worked out, we followed TV shows, we made great friends, we were always in touch with our families, we were never idle, and even on our off days always going to the market, cooking, and cleaning the house with friends to pass the time. Because if we are home alone for a day, we think the world has come to an end. We felt very lonely. Our stress increased a lot and because of that, we are always busy with work.” (P1)
	Subtheme 2: Support systems and coping	“It's kind of easier in here. You don't have those

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
	strategies during resettlement	barriers that you have back home. Because the lack of job back home is kind of different. But, yeah, you have, like, the best thing here, you have lots of opportunity. (P3)"
	Subtheme 3: Emotional and psychological stress	“Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience, even for those who are successful professionally and personally.” (P1)
	Subtheme 4: Professional guidance and training	“The Case worker took English and specialized classes in a field for us. While I worked in field, then we found the rest of the work ourselves.” (P1)
	Subtheme 5:Transportation challenges during early professional adjustment	“In here or western culture, the most difficult thing for me at the beginning was transportation because as you know now, as I know now, without a car Living is very difficult.” (P4)
Theme 4: Modifying job search techniques and getting employment information	Subtheme 1: Job search networks and online platforms	“When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application. And when we didn't know, we later followed various websites such as Indeed, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, department emails that usually publish job

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
		information or job search information, and sometimes we found a job from friends who had worked before and with their advice.” (P1)
	Subtheme 2: Difficulty in not having work experience	“Without any prior job experiences. It’s hard to get a job.” (P4)
Theme 5: Employment integration obstacles, both personal and structural	Subtheme 1: Inadequate financial help during	“The state I was living was not that great in providing support for refugees either. I was getting only small financial support for a month. For a few months. I didn't want to even take that. I wanted them to find me a job, help me find a job.” (P4)
	Subtheme 2: Economic and housing hardship	“I try to study some... professional, new professional. I paid, you know, for a course in a professional field in a university for many months. And the fees were paid on my own. I had some, you know, saving. After getting a degree from university. I applied, probably. For dozens of companies.” (P7)
	Subtheme 3: Work culture and communication barriers	“Especially me being the responsible person, I must be home at a certain time so we could all eat together. It impacts my work, because they want

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
		me to stay longer and help. But I can't because I must come home and help with the family and then for professional, I think again, just not really being able to connect to a lot of the people at work there because we all grew up so differently. (P9)
	Subtheme 4: Cultural adjustment and workplace comfort	When I started a job like with my coworkers. I would say I felt comfortable. I felt okay with the coworkers. There were not too many difficulties” (P10)
	Subtheme 5: Professional guidance needs in resettlement	“And in a foreign country, you start from scratch; you definitely need someone to guide you.” (P1)
	Subtheme 6: Confidence and self-efficacy challenges	“If you want to do a good job, or get a good payment, you must do something like you have to do some certifications, you have to go through some training. These are the big things. I mean, the source of that. Provide you with money for the training. These are the big things, like, kind of the barriers for me and the United States. (P3)
	Subtheme 7: Misjudgment of skills and qualifications exaggerated	“The third thing is, like, sometimes they call you overqualified, but when you don't ask my credential, why you call me

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
		overqualified. Because you already do not recognize my... credential, so when you don't recognize it, they over qualification term is like not true". (P8)
	Subtheme 8: Under-recognition of skills and experiences	“At first, they thought I couldn't do the work I started. When I was out of work for a few weeks, they realized that I could work and sent me a thank you note.” (P1)
Theme 6: Rebuilding professional identity and adapting to the American workforce	Subtheme 1: Economic instability and perceived undervaluation	“You have to continue your education, you have to like start going to the university, like, it's hard, because they said, you have to like have your degree from USA and it's very hard for a Professional working in fast food places, or I know job is job, but it is hard.” (P2)
	Subtheme 2: Career transition and adjustment	“I realized that my income was not enough. And my partner at that time had to quit the specific classes to work so we could pay our bills and take care of our kids.” (P6)
		Subtheme 1 Economic Instability and perceived Undervaluation

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
		<p>“You have to continue your education, you have to like start going to the university, like, it's hard, because they said, you have to like have your degree from USA and it's very hard for a Professional working in fast food places, or I know job is job, but it is hard.” (P2)</p>
	<p>Subtheme 2 Career Transition and Adjustment</p>	<p>“I realized that my income was not enough. And my partner at that time had to quit the specific classes to work so we could pay our bills and take care of our kids.” (P6)</p>
		<p>Subtheme 3 Emotional and confidence struggles in the workplace</p> <p>“During those years, either there were not much emotional help or assistance, or maybe I didn't know how to reach them.” (P6)</p>
	<p>Subtheme 4: Barriers to professional integration and recognition</p>	<p>“You know, the qualification that you had in Afghanistan, or whatever work you have been doing there. But those skills and qualifications were not recognized here in U.S.” (P5)</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
Theme 7: The Function of support systems in social and emotional adjustment	Subtheme 1: Social and cultural connection support	<p>“Relocation is not just a physical displacement. It is profound cultural, emotional, and social change. Therefore, no person, no matter how strong, can truly progress without real support. For example, the only thing that saved us during our years of relocation was good people who supported us not only with work and some things so that we wouldn't feel lonely. Support is not just a face, it is an experience, and we had this experience.” (P1)</p>
	Subtheme 2: Lack of support with medical and financial assistance	<p>“I didn't have any help with medical expenses, and I didn't approve for medical expenses, and my husband had a good salary, but this is not enough for my kids. He had to support some of his family in his country back home, and I had a part-time job, I was sick, I couldn't work full-time. Because I have kids and I was expecting. There were many challenges. We needed support.” (P2)</p>
	Subtheme 3: Job hunting by contacting stores and shops	<p>“When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application.” (P1)</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
	Subtheme 4: Social services and financial assistance	“Actually, the support that I got was Like, mostly from Friends, government also, like, social services. They provided me, like, some money for the courses and stuff and, I like the environment of the United States. They are very supportive. The people that I saw around, Kind of compared to other countries that I heard from my friends they are very, supportive, and they support you on everything. Like, if you go a new job.” (P3)
	Subtheme 5: Institutional and language support	“The community colleges and these things should, like, helped a lot too, like, if you go there as a refugee, they will provide you some program with the language and everything. I found it very useful for my family, for my partner and everything. I would say that that's a big thing, and big move for the refugees.” (P3)
Theme 8: Adapting communication in the workplace and preserving cultural identity	Subtheme 1: Cultural and professional transition	“In this culture that may be very much welcome and acceptable here and, we have to learn to allow our family members to adapt this culture and be open-minded to be acceptable in this society”. (P6)

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
		“First of all, every job I started, and we've worked in many places so far, the accents are very different.
	Subtheme 2: Workplace integration and social adjustment	For a week or two, I didn't understand what people were asking me, or they didn't understand when I was talking to them. Over time, I got used to it. Talking with them in their accent, their way of asking questions, and then they became normal to me.” (P1)
	Subtheme 3: Cultural identity and media influence	“Due to media propaganda and the lack of knowledge and information. Afghanistan always shows up as a country of conflict, as a country of war, and the people think that they are not like modern people there is no education, but it's not true. We have lots of qualified and very educated people and if we compare that with the neighborhood countries those people from those countries, they find themselves in this country. But Afghans have two problems. At first, their community, and second, the systems they don't recognize them.” (P8)
	Subtheme 4:	“Specifically,

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
	Communication barriers and adaptation strategies	communication style, I think it's very different now, because. Your kind of must be very cold. The way that you speak, you can't really be friends with your coworkers, you must have a balance between being friends, and then also just maintaining a work relationship. I think here it's you have you to just, I wasn't very aware of that, so when I got this job now, I must like be very careful of how you word things, and so I think that's one of the ways that I've modified my communication style.” (P9)
Theme 9: Handling social perceptions, stereotypes, and Afghan identity at work	<p data-bbox="662 1056 1008 1161">Subtheme 1: Normalization and acceptance of discrimination</p> <p data-bbox="662 1423 1008 1528">Subtheme 2: In integration, self-advocacy and positive engagement are important.</p> <p data-bbox="662 1717 1008 1822">Subtheme 3: Stereotyping and identity concealment</p>	<p data-bbox="1040 1056 1386 1381">“The experience of discrimination or injustice of many refugees, especially Afghans, is real but hidden, not obvious, but I feel and think that this discrimination is a natural thing and in every country.” (P1)</p> <p data-bbox="1040 1423 1386 1675">“I'm an Afghan I don't feel bad I feel proud. I explain myself to them, and I did not see any reactions, bad reactions, from them in society. So, I did not face that.” (P10)</p> <p data-bbox="1040 1717 1386 1860">“It is so extreme, especially in the late years. Sometimes I'm even hesitant to mention where I</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example quote
		am or what religion I follow." (P6)
Theme 10: Discrimination at work and psychological coping mechanisms	Subtheme 1: Experiences of discrimination	"Applying for a job there you're really qualified for that job, but they don't really consider because I feel like that, but I don't believe that that's the case." (P5)
	Subtheme 2: Coping and resolution strategies	"I deal with it by staying professional, focusing on my work, and improving myself through my performance., and, I try my best."(P2)

### ***Theme 1: Early Relocation Challenges and Obstacles to Social and Professional***

#### ***Integration***

The theme covers the first social and professional challenges encountered during early relocation, such as systematic injustices, communication problems, restricted access to resources, and cultural misunderstandings. Even though some individuals reported having a good start, they faced major obstacles in getting their foreign education and work experience acknowledged, which affected their early psychological adjustment and job opportunities.

Participants often talked about the confusion, stress, and unforeseen challenges that came with moving early. One participant mentioned, for instance, "The other issue was about the language barrier to finding the job." This is a major problem" (P8), highlighting how their employment search was directly hampered by communication

limitations. "We didn't see any problems at that time, but over time, you will understand the problems yourself," another participant said. we started life from scratch" (P1), demonstrating the slow recognition of more complex resettlement issues. These quotations show how participants' early experiences influenced their ability to shift psychologically and find work.

This theme was developed by combining the following six subthemes:

**Subtheme1: Communication and Resources Barriers During Early Resettlement.** Communication issues were cited by participants as one of the most pressing and daunting obstacles when they first arrived. It was challenging to use resources, handle job searches, and take advantage of professional possibilities due to limited English ability. Many reported feeling alone because of social and linguistic obstacles. By saying, "The other issue was about the language barrier to finding the job," one participant highlighted the seriousness of the situation. This is a big issue. (P8). Regarding the absence of support systems after early arrival, one participant said, "When I came first, I didn't know anybody, and it was really hard for me to navigate the jobs around." (P5). The experiences demonstrate how early movement and access to opportunities were hindered by communication hurdles.

**Subtheme 2: Cultural Misunderstanding and Systematic Inequality.** Cultural differences often cause participants to feel uncomfortable or misunderstood in social and professional settings. Social cues, professional conventions, and little gestures frequently have distinct connotations in Afghan and American contexts, making immigrants feel misinterpreted or condemned. Cultural differences often caused participants to feel

uncomfortable or misunderstood in social and professional settings. Social cues, professional conventions, and little gestures frequently have distinct connotations in Afghan and American contexts, making immigrants feel misinterpreted or condemned. “There are certain things that we interpret differently than Americans... when I said something, for example, thumbs up... in my country is not a good thing... I had to learn all those things by making mistakes and seeing other people are laughing.” (P1). These incidents demonstrate the ways in which cultural mismatch fueled emotions of social vulnerability, self-doubt, and injustice.

**Subtheme 3: Positive Beginning Followed by Adjustment Challenges.** A number of participants reported that while their early days in the United States were bearable or even hopeful, the reality of institutional and individual difficulties eventually overshadowed this initial optimism. As time went on, they encountered emotional hardship, bureaucratic requirements, and financial constraint. This change was eloquently explained by one participant: “We didn't see any problems at that time, but over time, you will understand the problems yourself... we started life from scratch.” (P1). The gradual growth of relocation difficulties and the accumulative pressures that emerged following the initial arrival period are both reflected in this story.

**Subtheme 4: Challenges With Recognition of Foreign Education and Experiences.** The majority of participants voiced dissatisfaction about the lack of recognition they received in the United States for their professional and educational experiences from Afghanistan. This led to a sense of devaluation, unemployment, and a weakened professional identity. As one participant summarized this struggle: “They

value the internal experience. They don't value your background, your experience.” (P8). Many were unable to obtain equal work despite having significant qualifications, which led to both financial and emotional distress.

#### **Subtheme 5: Navigating Early Relocation and Employment Challenges**

**Without Guidance.** Many times, participants handled early resettlement with little to no formal instruction. Without mentorship, career guidance, or culturally sensitive support, they often took low-skilled occupations that had nothing to do with their professional backgrounds just to make ends meet.

One participant explained, “I had to start from somewhere to... pay my bills... at the beginning it was hard because I was never used to this kind of work... but by passing of the time, I got used to it, and then navigate around, knowing other people.” (P5). This exemplifies the coexistence of employment motivated by necessity and eventual self-directed adaptation.

#### **Subtheme 6: Overcoming Early Hardship Community and Agency**

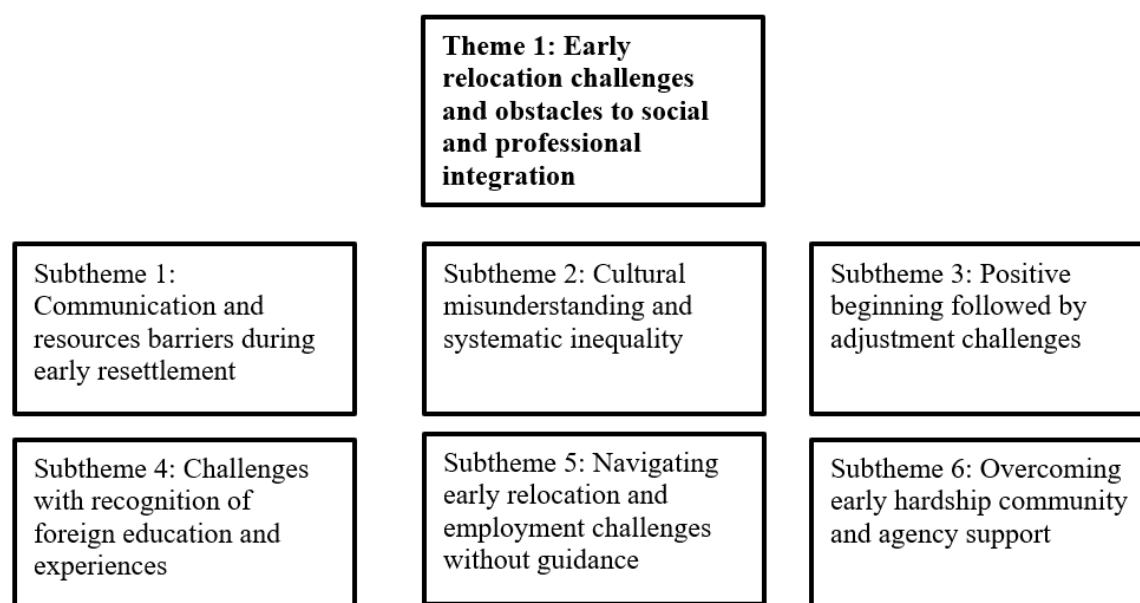
**Support.** Despite major obstacles, a large number of participants depended on agency assistance or community networks to manage the problems of early migration. But some also pointed out that the requirements of Afghan refugees were not well met by the support systems in place.

One participant gave the following explanation of the mismatch in service delivery: “I participate in many jobs’ fair events, but they were useless for us... what they're looking for we are not suitable for... what we are looking for, they don't accept us... I think for Afghans, they should establish a different structure... They should hire

qualified Afghans... at least they know about the system, about the culture, and about the consequences.” (P8). This viewpoint emphasizes the insufficiency of institutional support structures as well as the resilience offered by community involvement.

### Figure 1

*Theme 1: Early Relocation Challenges and Obstacles to Social and Professional Integration*



### *Theme 2: Getting Around American Workplace Customs and Cultural Expectations*

This theme highlights the social and cultural learning necessary to perform well in professional settings by examining participants' experiences adapting to American workplace standards. It also shows how they were able to handle cultural differences and workplace expectations thanks to their earlier professional training and Afghan community networks.

According to the participants, adjusting to American workplace expectations was a gradual learning process that necessitated comprehension of new organizational norms,

performance standards, and communication methods. One participant thought, “Adapting to the professional environment and work culture in America is one of the main challenges... when I started working, my manager expected me to be fast and clear. I thought that if I made a mistake, I would have to admit it” (P1) Others, like P8, clarified that having outside experience facilitated cultural adjustment, saying, “It's different for us, as a professional who came to this country... we already know about the cultures, about the systems” (P8)

There are two subthemes in this theme.

**Subtheme1: Workplace Norms and Cultural Differences.** According to the participants, learning American workplace customs is a continuous cultural adjustment process. The hierarchical structure, speed demands, and communication techniques of the United States were unfamiliar to many in comparison to Afghan professional environments. This subtheme illustrates how adjusting to variations in tone, speed, directness, and expectations initially caused uncertainty but eventually eased with practice.

According to one participant, adjusting necessitated adopting new standards: "My manager expected me to be quick and clear when I started working. “I thought that if I made a mistake, I would have to admit it.” (P1). These observations demonstrate how job adaptation required ongoing interpretation of strange standards, which frequently affected communication ease and confidence.

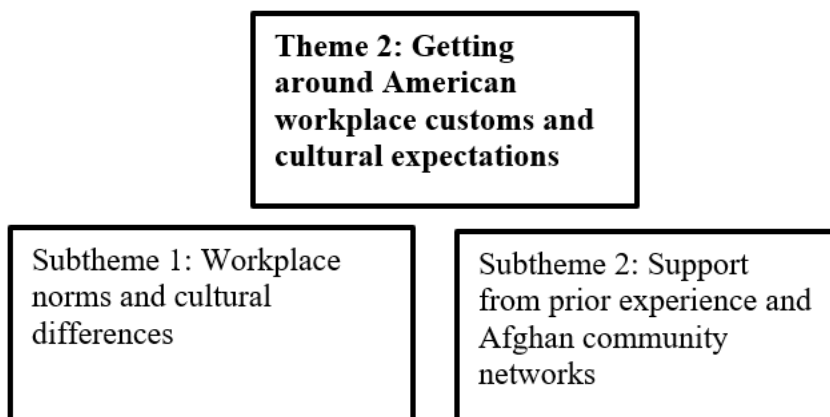
**Subtheme2: Support From Prior Experience and Afghan Community Networks.** Numerous participants highlighted how their prior job experiences and

connections to the Afghan community made navigating workplace differences easier. Some refugees gained a basic awareness of American expectations through exposure to multicultural teams or familiarity with foreign work environments. Members of the Afghan community also acted as unofficial mentors, providing consolation, direction, and useful counsel.

As one participant give the following explanation, "It's different for us... it's easy to adjust because you already know about the systems... we already know about the cultures" (P8), this benefit is evident. This suggests that cultural adaptation was not universal; in order to better manage workplace expectations, some participants heavily relied on prior experiences and ethnic networks.

## **Figure 2**

*Theme 2: Getting Around American Workplace Customs and Cultural Expectations*



*Theme 3: Stress Reduction and Psychological Adjustment During Resettlement*

Significant psychological and emotional strain was reported by participants during relocation, which was frequently associated with uncertainty, separation, and the

challenges of starting over from scratch. Relocating is a psychological shock even in the best of circumstances, as P1 clarified, adding that “Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience... relocation is a psychological shock even at the best of times” (P1). Others highlighted the challenges of adjusting to new surroundings and obligations, pointing out how these demands increased emotional suffering in the early stages of adjustment. These observations collectively demonstrate that participants' psychological health was crucial to their ability to adjust to new cultural and professional environments. There are five subthemes in this theme.

**Subtheme1: Coping and Distraction Strategies.** Participants' individual strategies for coping with stress, loneliness, and psychological strain during resettlement are highlighted in this subtheme. To avoid emotional overload, many relied on routines, pastimes, exercise, or maintaining social interactions. These techniques turned into vital resources for preserving stability in strange settings.

As one participant explained, "To kill time, we cooked and cleaned the house with friends, worked out, watched TV, and made wonderful friends." When we spend a day at home by ourselves, we believe that the world is ending (P1). These coping mechanisms lessened the psychological effects of loneliness and maintained motivation throughout trying times of change.

**Subtheme 2: Support System and Coping Strategies During Resettlement.** In order to reduce emotional and social stress, family, friends, community organizations, and professional organizations were crucial. By offering knowledge, inspiration, and a feeling of community, these support networks made participants feel less isolated while

they adapted to life in the United States. One participant said, "You have lots of opportunity... you don't have those barriers that you have back home" (P3), demonstrating how having access to resources boosted optimism and decreased stress. During resettlement, these networks provided a crucial layer of defense.

**Subtheme 3: Emotional and Psychological Stress.** Participants often reported experiencing extreme emotional stress as a result of everyday uncertainty, cultural displacement, and homesickness. Mental exhaustion, perplexity, and loneliness were prevalent in the early phases of change. Many found it difficult to cope with the emotional strain of being away from their loved ones and their daily routine. "Sometimes I just don't feel myself," one participant clarified. I feel as though my family is what I'm missing (P1). The psychological difficulties that followed their efforts to restore order in a foreign setting are reflected in these narratives.

**Subtheme 4: Professional Guidance and Training.** By providing participants with useful tools to negotiate the U.S. workforce, job training, English lessons, and caseworker support reduced stress. Participants in structured programs felt more prepared and had less doubt about prospects and expectations. "The case worker took English and specialized classes for us... then we found the rest of the work ourselves," as one participant explained (P1). Support like this boosted self-esteem and lessened the emotional stress that comes with figuring out new systems.

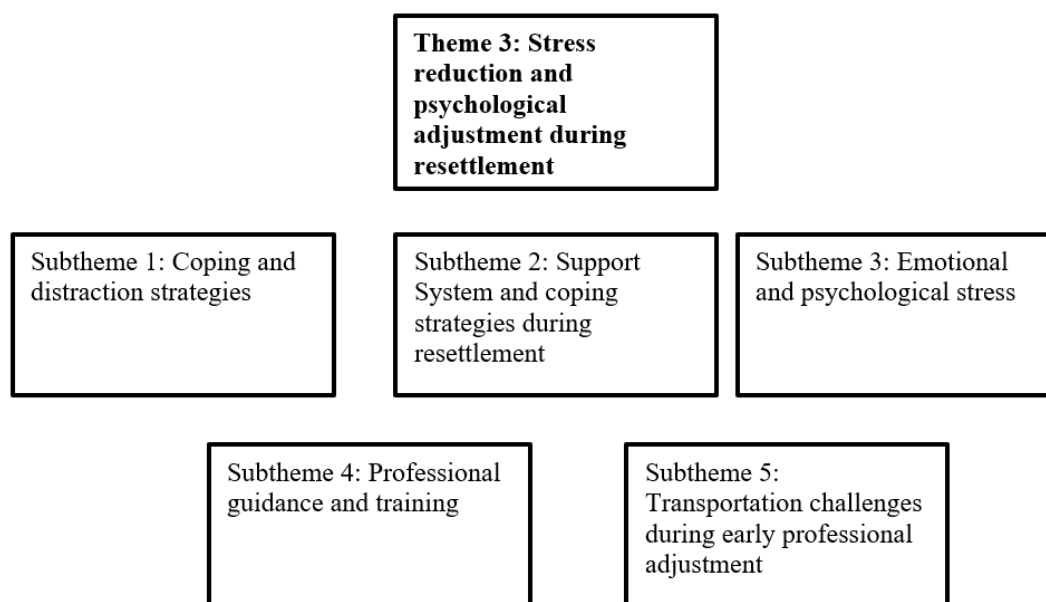
**Subtheme 5: Transportation Challenges During Early Professional Adjustment.** Particularly in the first several months of resettlement, transportation issues added to the stress. Lack of dependable transportation made it difficult for participants to

go to work shifts, job interviews, and classes, which delayed employment and increased reliance on others.

This difficulty was highlighted by one participant, who said, "At first, transportation was the hardest thing for me. Living without a car is really hard" (P4). During the early stages of professional reintegration, transportation impediments exacerbated stress and delayed recovery.

### Figure 3

#### *Theme 3: Stress Reduction and Psychological Adjustment During Resettlement*



#### *Theme 4: Modifying Job Search Techniques and Getting Employment Information*

The job search process was characterized by participants as a difficult shift that involved switching from unofficial, community-based tactics to unfamiliar online platforms. "When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop... then we followed websites such as Indeed, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and online

searches,” P1 clarified, illustrating the evolution of job-seeking from personal networks to digital resources. One participant mentioned that some employers "don't value your background, your experience" (P8), indicating that many still encountered obstacles in spite of these efforts. Taken together, these experiences show how Afghan refugee professionals faced systemic obstacles in the U.S. labor market while learning new job search techniques.

There are two subthemes in this theme.

**Subtheme 1: Job Search Networks and Online Platforms.** This subtheme demonstrates how, in order to survive in a foreign labor market, participants mostly relied on their personal networks and internet resources. Before learning how to use digital sites like Indeed, LinkedIn, and Glassdoor, many started with casual, face-to-face job inquiries. "We started by asking people near our house," a participant recounted. Later on, we used websites like Indeed and Glassdoor (P1). The participants' progressive acquisition of the social and technology skills necessary for a successful job search is demonstrated by these changing tactics.

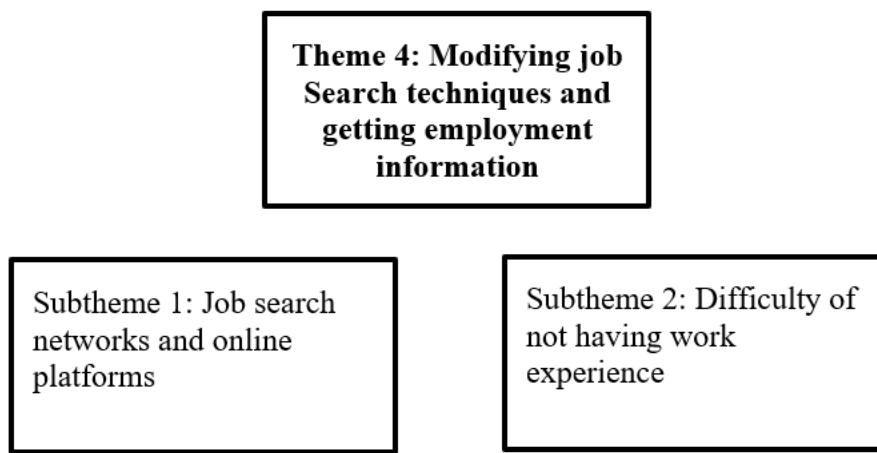
**Subtheme 2: Difficulty in Not Having Work Experience. Lack of U.S.** employment experience was regularly cited by participants as limiting their options. Due to employers' preference for local knowledge, even those with solid professional qualifications in Afghanistan had trouble landing work.

In summary, one participant stated that "it's hard to get a job without any prior job experience" (P4). Many were discouraged and forced into low-level or unrelated

occupations as a result of the mismatch between prior qualifications and U.S. hiring expectations.

**Figure 4**

*Theme 4: Modifying Job Search Techniques and Getting Employment Information*



*Theme 5: Employment Integration Obstacles, Both Personal and Structural*

Participants detailed a variety of institutional and personal obstacles, such as insufficient financial assistance, unstable housing, and restricted access to training, that hindered their capacity to secure steady employment. “The state I was living was not that great in providing support... I was getting only small financial support for a month,” P4 said, elucidating the lack of aid during early resettlement. I was only receiving minimal financial assistance for a month,” emphasizing how a lack of funds caused immediate difficulties. As P7 noted, “I paid... the course in a professional field in a university for many months... the fees were paid on my own,” others found it difficult to pay for their own training, demonstrating how financial strains impeded career advancement. These

incidents demonstrate the structural inequalities that prevented Afghan refugees from integrating into the workforce over the long run.

There are eight subthemes in this theme.

**Subtheme 1: Inadequate Financial Help During Early Resettlement.**

Participants repeatedly underlined that initial barriers to stable employment were caused by a lack of early financial support. "The state I was living in wasn't that great in providing support," P4 clarified. "I was getting only small financial support for a month," demonstrating how inadequate support increased stress and interfered with their capacity to concentrate on training or job searching. Housing choices and employment opportunities were impacted by this early financial instability.

**Subtheme 2: Economic and Housing Hardship.** High living costs and financial difficulties were cited by several participants as the main structural obstacles to workforce inclusion. "paid... the course in a professional field... and the fees were paid on my own," P7 clarified. "I probably applied to dozens of companies," demonstrating how erratic spending and a dearth of employment options resulted in ongoing financial hardship. Many were compelled by these difficulties to modify their career plans based more on financial constraints than on job objectives.

**Subtheme 3: Work Culture and Communication Barriers.** A number of participants highlighted how entering the American workforce was more challenging upon relocation due to the absence of formal mentorship and professional counseling. "In a foreign country, you start from scratch; you definitely need someone to guide you," P1

explained, illustrating how the lack of professional support exacerbated misunderstandings over career trajectories and work norms.

**Subtheme 4: Cultural Adjustment and Workplace Comfort.** Language barriers, cultural misconceptions, and poor communication all had an impact on participants' interactions at work. Misunderstandings or feelings of inadequacy were occasionally caused by these restrictions. According to one participant, “Especially me being the responsible person, I must be home at a certain time so we could all eat together. It impacts my work, because they want me to stay longer and help. But I can't because I must come home and help with the family and then for professional, I think again, just not really being able to connect to a lot of the people at work there because we all grew up so differently.” (P9). In addition to delaying complete professional integration, these challenges increased emotional strain.

**Subtheme 5: Professional Guidance Needs in Resettlement.** A number of participants highlighted how entering the American workforce was more challenging upon relocation due to the absence of formal mentorship and professional counseling. “In a foreign country, you start from scratch; you definitely need someone to guide you,” P1 explained, illustrating how the lack of professional support exacerbated misunderstandings over career trajectories and work norms.

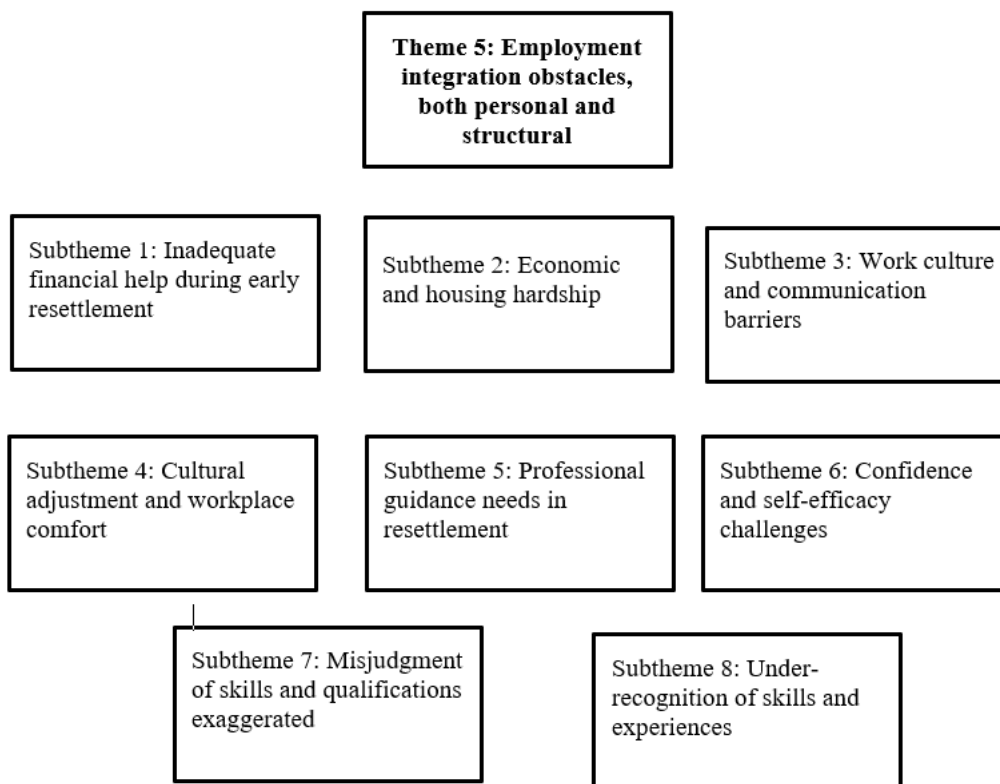
**Subtheme 6: Confidence and Self-Efficacy Challenges.** Numerous participants' confidence was eroded as a result of persistent challenges during the job seeking process. P3's observation that “If you want to do a good job... you must have experience... these are like the barriers for me,” reflects the psychological toll of repeatedly facing

difficulties and doubting one's own skills. These encounters frequently shaped the participants' approach to potential future employment.

**Subtheme 7: Misjudgment of Skills and Qualifications Exaggerated.**

Additionally, participants talked of being mistakenly classified as "overqualified," which limited their options for employment and irritated them. By stating that "Sometimes they call you overqualified... they don't recognize it... the overqualification term is not true," P8 demonstrated how prejudices and misconceptions hindered a fair assessment of their professional abilities. This poor decision hindered career advancement and discouraged many others.

**Subtheme 8: Underrecognition of Skills and Experiences.** The undervaluation of refugees' professional skills by employers was another persistent obstacle. Employers' presumptions frequently outweighed demonstrated ability, as demonstrated by P1's statement, "At first, they thought I couldn't do the work... when I was out of work for a few weeks, they realized that I could work," Due to this underappreciation, skill-appropriate employment was delayed and emotional frustration resulted.

**Figure 5***Theme 5: Employment Integration Obstacles, Both Personal and Structural**Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity and Adapting to the American Workforce*

Theme 6 was defined by the participants as the professional and emotional challenge of reestablishing their careers in a system that frequently disregarded their prior accomplishments. During the process of reestablishing their professional identities, many faced financial instability, forced career changes, and a persistent sensation that their competence was not acknowledged, which caused a great deal of stress. As one participant put it, “You have to continue your education... you have to like have your degree from USA... it is very hard for a professional working in fast food places” (P2)

There are four subthemes in this theme.

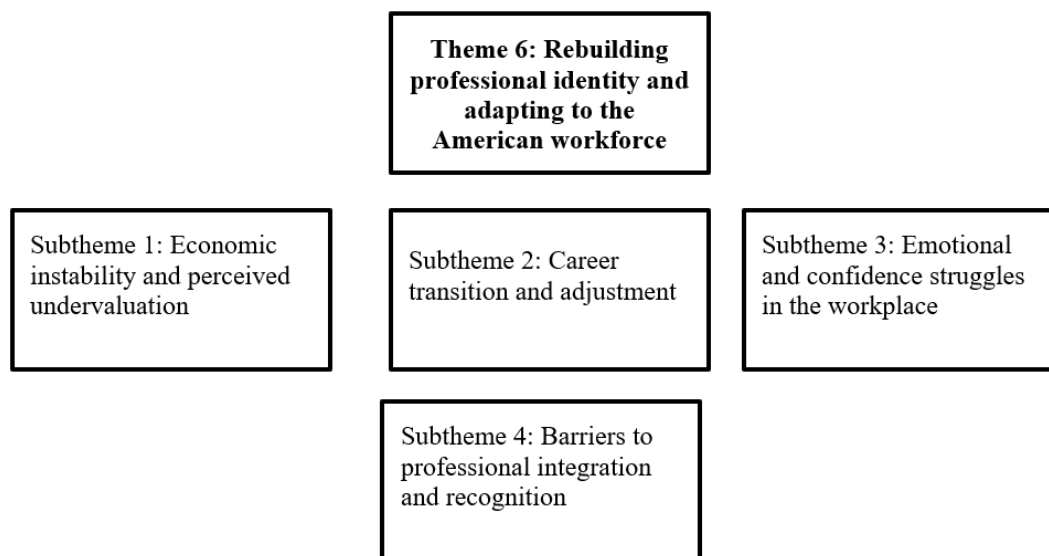
**Subtheme 1: Economic Instability and Perceived Undervaluation.** Participants talked about feeling that their professional backgrounds were underappreciated in the American employment market while also facing economic insecurity. Many were driven into low-paying jobs that were considerably below their prior professional status while struggling to meet their financial obligations. "You have to continue your education, you have to like start going to the university," one participant said, succinctly describing this feeling of devaluation. For a professional, working in fast food restaurants is quite difficult (P2). This quotation demonstrates how foreign credentials were frequently given little weight, which resulted in a terrible mismatch between participants' skills and the few job opportunities open to them.

**Subtheme 2: Career Transition and Adjustment.** A common theme among the participants was the need to shift career paths in the United States due to financial constraints and the lack of acknowledgment of their Afghan qualifications. Prioritizing financial survival during this shift frequently meant abandoning professional or educational objectives. "I realized that my income was not enough," one participant explained, describing this challenging transition. In order to pay our bills and care for our children, my partner... had to quit the specific classes to work so we could pay our bills and take care of our kids (P6). This case shows how participants' approaches to their career trajectories were altered in the U.S. setting by economic need, which also disrupted professional objectives.

**Subtheme 3: Emotional and Confidence Struggles in the Workplace.** Many individuals experienced severe emotional distress and a decline in self-confidence during the process of restoring their professions. Some experienced loneliness as a result of not knowing how to get professional or emotional help while adjusting to new requirements at work. “During those years, either there were not much emotional help or assistance, or maybe I didn't know how to reach them”. One participant remarked (P6). This experience demonstrates how participants frequently felt unprepared, overwhelmed, and alone as they tried to adapt to new work contexts due to the lack of readily available support services.

**Subtheme 4: Barriers to Professional Integration and Recognition.**

Participants also talked about structural obstacles that kept them from pursuing their careers, such the pervasive undervaluation of Afghan training, education, and achievements. These challenges caused a sense of professional invisibility and postponed career advancement. In a succinct summary, one participant said, "You know the qualification that you had in Afghanistan... those skills and qualifications were not recognized here in the U.S." (P5). Participants found it challenging to reclaim their prior professional standing as a result of this lack of acknowledgment, which led to ongoing underemployment and dissatisfaction.

**Figure 6***Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity and Adapting to the American Workforce**Theme 7: The Function of Support Systems in Social and Emotional Adjustment*

The participants stressed the importance of practical, social, and emotional support networks in guiding them through the challenges of relocation. Support, according to many, was what kept them resilient as they adjusted to new situations and duties. According to P1, “Relocation is not only the physical displacement but also a psychological shock... the only thing that saved us was good people who supported us so we wouldn’t feel lonely” (P1). These thoughts show how during the transition process, support networks helped lower stress, lessen loneliness, and foster a sense of community.

There are five subthemes in this theme.

**Subtheme 1: Social and Cultural Connection Support.** Emotional support from family and the community was frequently cited by participants as being crucial to their

psychological well-being during relocation. These support networks aided in their stress management and environment adaptation. “Relocation is not only the physical displacement... the only thing that saved us was good people who supported us so we wouldn’t feel lonely” said one participant, highlighting the significance of this assistance (P1). This demonstrates how the emotional burden of resettlement was mitigated by emotional reassurance from reliable people.

**Subtheme 2: Lack of Support With Medical and Financial Assistance.**

Participants felt even more apprehensive since, in spite of some encouraging support, they also encountered gaps in the resources that were available to them. A lot of people complained about not receiving enough assistance in overcoming emotional and practical obstacles. According to P2, “I didn't have any help with medical expenses... there were many challenges. We needed support” (P2). This comment illustrates how families adjusting to new living arrangements had extra layers of stress due to uneven or restricted finances.

**Subtheme 3: Job Hunting by Contacting Stores and Shops.** Because they were not familiar with internet applications or formal hiring procedures, participants talked about employing direct, in-person job hunting techniques, like visiting stores, shops, and local companies. This hands-on approach was frequently motivated by a lack of help on navigating the U.S. labor market and inadequate English skills. According to one participant, “When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application.” (P1) When formal

routes appeared unreachable, participants turned to informal and time-consuming search tactics, as this example illustrates.

**Subtheme 4: Social Services and Financial Assistance.** Participants underlined how important community support and social service programs were to them during their initial time of transition. Access to community support, training support, and government-funded aid reduced financial hardship and gave them a sense of security while they adapted to new work settings. These services helped participants meet their practical requirements while also boosting their self-esteem so they could pursue long-term objectives, work, and education. The United States was seen by many participants as a helpful country where help was readily available and attentive to their requirements. The importance of these resources was explained by one participant, who said that “the support that I got was like, mostly from friends, government also, like, social services. They provided me, like, some money for the courses and stuff, and I like the environment of the United States. They are very supportive... the people that I saw around... they support you on everything, like if you go [to] a new job.” (P3). This analysis focuses on how participants were able to lay the groundwork for their professional integration and relocation with the aid of financial aid and community support networks.

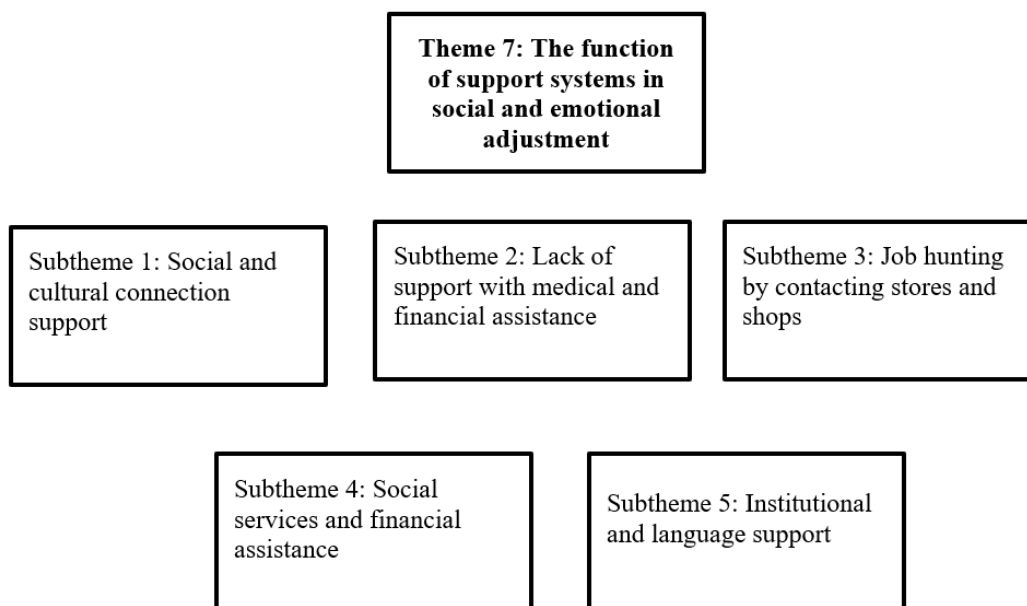
**Subtheme 5: Institutional and Language Support.** For participants to regain confidence and successfully navigate social and professional settings in the United States, institutional support—in particular, language programs, community college resources, and organized orientation services—was essential. Many of the participants clarified that these programs were crucial stepping stones that enabled them to work independently,

interact successfully in daily life, and access education. In order to achieve long-term stability, integrate into the workforce, and support their families throughout the initial stages of resettlement, participants repeatedly stressed that learning a language was essential.

“The community colleges and these things should, like, helped a lot too, like, if you go there as a refugee, they will provide you some program with the language and everything. I found it very useful for my family, for my partner and everything. I would say that that's a big thing, and big move for the refugees.” (P3). This analysis demonstrates how language programs served as essential empowerment tools, enhancing communication skills, bolstering family stability, and creating avenues for social inclusion and employment.

### **Figure 7**

*Theme 7: The Function of Support Systems in Social and Emotional Adjustment*



***Theme 8: Adapting Communication in the Workplace and Preserving Cultural Identity***

This subject emphasizes the ongoing communication style negotiations Afghan refugee professionals make in American companies while still attempting to preserve their cultural identity. Participants repeatedly stated that communication was closely related to self-assurance, a sense of belonging, cultural expectations, and how others saw them, rather than just language proficiency. According to one participant, “For a week or two, I didn’t understand what people were asking me, or they didn’t understand when I was talking to them. Over time, I got used to it. Talking with them in their accent, their way of asking questions, and then they became normal to me.” (P1)

There are four subthemes in this theme.

**Subtheme 1: Cultural and Professional Transition.** Participants clarified that learning new communication norms requires constant effort in order to adapt to American academic and professional demands. This entailed changing expressions, adjusting to new feedback techniques, and adhering to workplace standards for tempo, tone, and clarity. One participant emphasized this shift in culture: “In this culture that may be very much welcome and acceptable here and, we have to learn to allow our family members to adapt this culture and be open-minded to be acceptable in this society.” (P6). This shows how individuals felt obligated to assist their families in acclimating to American cultural standards, in addition to their own personal adaptation.

**Subtheme 2: Workplace Integration and Social Adjustment.** Communication comfort was a major factor in social integration at work. It frequently required time to get used to varied accents and speaking patterns, according to the participants. Their

socialization at work was significantly influenced by this change. A participant revealed: “For a week or two, I didn't understand what people were asking me, or they didn't understand when I was talking to them. Over time, I got used to it. Talking with them in their accent, their way of asking questions, and then they became normal to me.” (P1). The incremental aspect of integration is encapsulated in this quotation, which also demonstrates how learning and imitating communication patterns were crucial to gaining social comfort at work.

**Subtheme 3: Cultural Identity and Media Influence.** The way the media portrayed Afghanistan influenced how other people saw them infuriated the participants. Their confidence in sharing aspects of their cultural identity or expressing themselves was impacted by these representations. As one person put it:

Due to media propaganda... Afghanistan always shows up as a country of conflict... people think they are not like modern people... but it's not true. We have lots of qualified and very educated people... But Afghans have two problems. At first, their community, and second, the systems they don't recognize them. (P8)

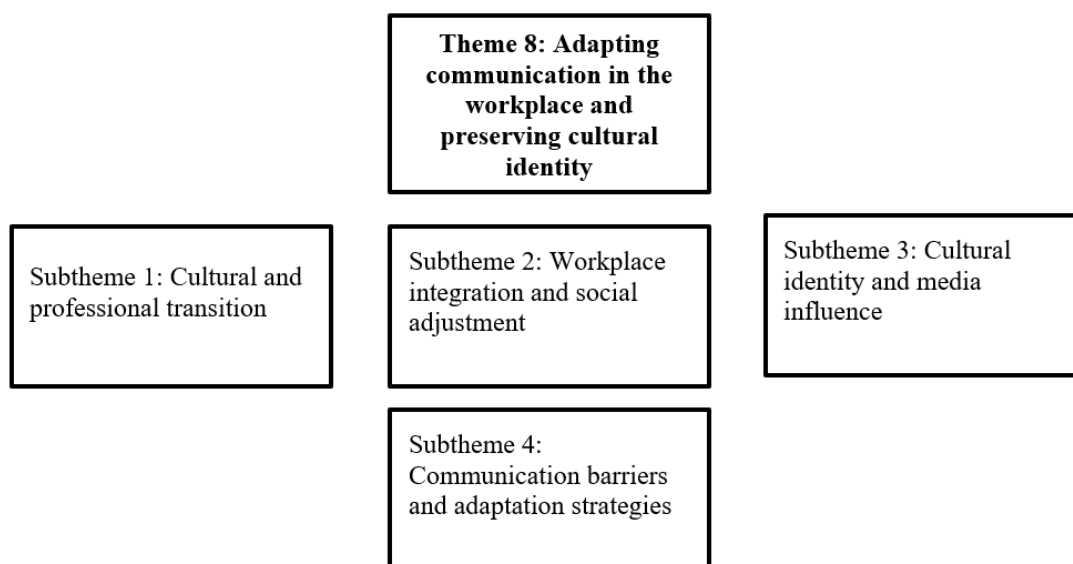
This claim demonstrates how unfavorable preconceptions put additional emotional and communication strain on Afghan professionals, who have to refute false information while defending their identity.

**Subtheme 4: Communication Barriers and Adaptation Strategies.** Participants talked about how they had to modify their emotional presentation, tone, and facial expressions to prevent miscommunication at work. Along with learning how to speak in

ways that are required in professional situations in the United States, they also had to learn when to be formal and when to be quiet. One person gave a precise description of this: “Communication style... it’s very different now... you can’t really be friends with your coworkers, you must have a balance... I must be very careful of how you word things... I’ve modified my communication style.” (P9)

### Figure 8

*Theme 8: Adapting Communication in the Workplace and Preserving Cultural Identity*



### *Theme 9: Handling Social Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Afghan Identity at Work*

This theme illustrates how Afghan refugee professionals dealt with expectations, preconceptions, and societal attitudes in American workplaces. Participants talked about Afghan identity-related presumptions, subtle and overt kinds of discrimination, and the emotional labor needed to control how other people saw them. “Sometimes people assume things about me because I’m Afghan... they don’t know my story.” (P3). In addition to reflecting how social perceptions influenced daily encounters, this quotation

provided as a continual reminder of how identity affected relationships at work. Participants' reactions to these experiences varied, ranging from self-advocacy to normalizing bias to, in certain situations, hiding portions of their identities. A complicated balance between negative stereotypes and affirming social experiences is demonstrated by the fact that, despite difficulties, many also noted positive encounters and respectful environments.

Three subthemes are included in this theme.

**Subtheme 1: Normalization and Acceptance of Discrimination.**

Discrimination, according to several participants, is covert, subtle, or so prevalent that it has been accepted. Although it decreased the possibility of confronting unfair treatment, they frequently internalized prejudice as a "normal" aspect of being Afghan in the United States, which helped them deal emotionally. Despite not always being overt, participants stressed that discrimination was felt in daily interactions. As one person put it: "The experience of discrimination or injustice of many refugees, especially Afghans, is real but hidden, not obvious, but I feel and think that this discrimination is a natural thing and in every country." (P1)

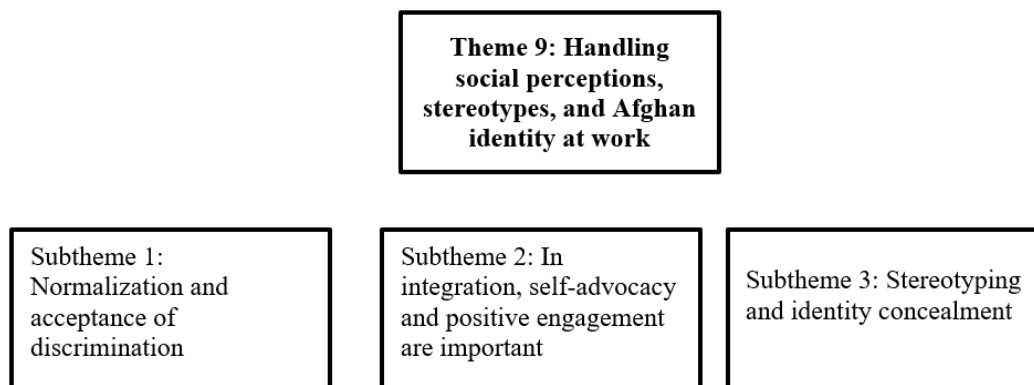
**Subtheme 2: In Integration, Self-Advocacy and Positive Engagement Are Important.** A number of individuals actively practiced self-advocacy as a means of achieving successful integration, as opposed to normalizing discrimination. They placed emphasis on preserving cultural pride, being transparent about their identity, and providing an explanation of their origin. According to these participants, proactive participation helped coworkers recognize them as unique persons rather than stereotypes

and avoided misunderstandings. One participant succinctly described this strategy: “I’m an Afghan I don’t feel bad, I feel proud. I explain myself to them, and I did not see any reactions, bad reactions, from them in society. So, I did not face that.” (P10)

**Subtheme 3: Stereotyping and Identity Concealment.** Some participants encountered more overt stereotypes, which made them hide aspects of their identities to prevent prejudice or condemnation. Because of the unfavorable media representations and misconceptions surrounding Afghanistan, they stated that they were hesitant to disclose their nationality, religion, or cultural origin. For some, hiding was a psychological barrier. This reluctance was noted by one participant as “It is so extreme, especially in the late years. Sometimes I’m even hesitant to mention where I am or what religion I follow.” (P6).

### Figure 9

*Theme 9: Handling Social Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Afghan Identity at Work*



***Theme 10: Discrimination at Work and Psychological Coping Mechanisms***

This issue encapsulates the ways in which Afghan refugee professionals dealt with prejudice in American employment and the coping mechanisms they devised.

Participants recounted instances in which their professional credentials were disregarded or questioned, making them feel devalued or assessed more on the basis of their Afghan identity than their skill. “Applying for a job, you're really qualified for that job, but they don't really consider you. I feel like that, but I don't believe that that's the case.” (P5).

This demonstrates how participants felt uncertain and emotionally strained when attempting to ascertain whether bias was affecting hiring decisions.

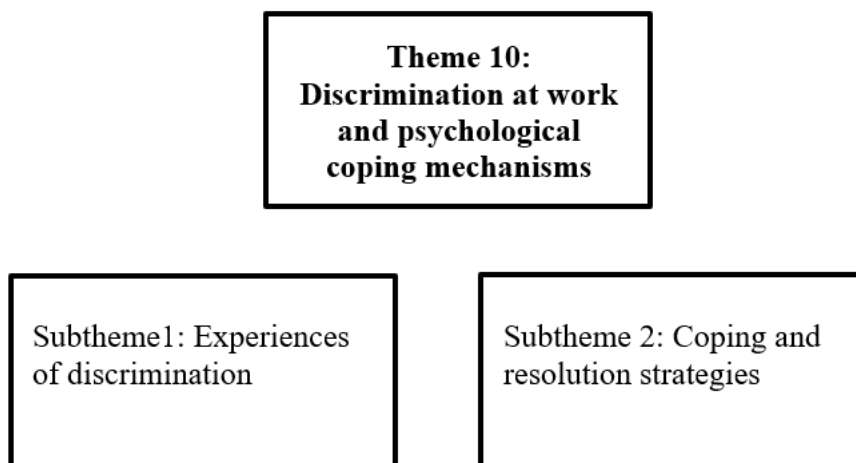
**Subtheme 1: Experiences of Discrimination.** The participants stated that discrimination frequently took the form of subtle manifestations, such as being passed over for opportunities or believing that their national background affected how employers viewed their training. These encounters, though not always obvious, reduced confidence and produced emotions of unfairness. The intricacy of dealing with prejudice in work settings was further demonstrated by the participants' internal struggle to determine whether bias was actually happening or if they were overanalyzing the circumstances.

There are two subthemes in this theme. One participant described this uncertainty directly, sharing: “Applying for a job, you're really qualified for that job, but they don't really consider you. I feel like that, but I don't believe that that's the case.” (P5). This quotation demonstrates how participants frequently perceived discriminating dynamics but were reluctant to completely identify them as bias, exhibiting both emotional control and the need to maintain objectivity.

**Subtheme 2: Coping and Resolution Strategies.** Despite the presence or suspicion of prejudice, individuals used coping mechanisms that prioritized self-control, professionalism, and emotional control. As a coping mechanism, they frequently concentrated on enhancing their performance, confirming their abilities, and keeping a cheerful disposition. They were able to maintain their sense of control at work and manage mental distress thanks to this strategy. One participant gave a detailed explanation of their coping strategy, saying, “I deal with it by staying professional, focusing on my work, and improving myself through my performance, and I try my best.” (P2). This quotation demonstrates a resilience-focused mindset, where participants' main reactions to discriminatory encounters were self-improvement and professionalism. Both emotional maturity and an inherent drive to overcome obstacles by self-improvement and persistent effort are evident in their tactics.

**Figure 10**

*Theme 10: Discrimination at Work and Psychological Coping Mechanisms*



### ***Maintaining Methodological Honesty***

Specific conceptualization of design and scientific integrity were upheld throughout the analysis. To ensure transparency, decisions about theme development, code, and data handling were carefully recorded. Following best-practice guidelines for reflexive TA to increase accuracy and clarity, the analysis deliberately “owned” its theoretical presumptions and embedded values (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To be methodologically honest means to be open and self-reflective throughout the whole analysis process. In this case, the researcher constantly thought about personal beliefs, biases, and they made these effects clear in their notes and audit trails. Systematically writing down methodological choices, like how codes are made, themes are created, and data are interpreted, gives a clear explanation for the choices made during analysis. Regularly writing in a reflective notebook and making sure that interpretations are based on participant data and not on the researcher's own ideas. To keep scientific rigor, problems of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are also given a lot of thought. This study builds trustworthiness and integrity by "owning" the theoretical beliefs and values that are a part of the analysis. This shows that the results are a credible, well-thought-out interpretation of real-life experiences and not just the result of researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This method lets you do an open, responsible qualitative study that strikes a good balance between emotion and intellectual rigor.

### ***Quality Practices and Reporting***

Each theme was supported by actual quotes taken from interview transcripts. Clear documentation of the analytical steps was kept, and in accordance with Braun and

Clarke (2022), an audit trail and reflective diary were kept to improve transparency and rigor. The findings show how participants explained and analyzed their experiences in relation to their social and environmental surroundings. This study shows a methodical and reliable implementation of reflexive theme analysis by stressing transparency, reflexive participation, and analytic depth.

For the analysis, only the reflective thematic analysis methodology developed by Braun and Clarke was employed. Memos were written automatically, transcripts were thoroughly examined, inductive codes were created, and themes were constructed through an interpretive and iterative process. According to RTA principles, researcher subjectivity was not seen as a bias to be minimized, but rather as an interpretive tool. The analytical focus remained on creating rich, structured meanings across the dataset through a completely reflective interpretive approach; neither IPA nor idiographic procedures were employed.

**Table 5***Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Age range	Profession	Years in U.S.
P1	Female	40+	Computer-related field	Unknown
P2	Female	30+	Computer-related field	Unknown
P3	Male	30+	Computer-related field	Unknown
P4	Male	50+	Engineer	Unknown
P5	Male	20+	Unknown	Unknown
P6	Female	50+	Teacher	Unknown
P7	Male	50+	Unknown	Unknown
P8	Male	40+	Doctor	Unknown
P9	Female	20+	Psychology	Unknown
P10	Female	40+	Unknown	Unknown

**Step 6: Writing Up**

In this step, the themes that had been worked on were put together into a well-organized story that linked distinct narratives, patterns of meaning, and theoretical concepts. Direct quotes from participants were used to support each theme and show the profound emotions and real-life situations of Afghan refugee workers in US. It was important for the story's presentation to have a good mix of detailed descriptions and commentary on what the participants meant. This way, the analysis showed not only what the participants went through, but also how they created understanding of those experiences.

When the paper was being written, the themes were carefully connected to the study's theoretical frameworks, which were the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

and the Stress Appraisal Model. This showed how the participants' ways of coping and how they saw stress fit with psychological theories of adaptation and resilience. The article focused on both the similar and different parts of the participants' experiences, showing how they made sense of professional identity, social integration, and discrimination as a group. As a link between analyzing the data and figuring out what it all means, this overarching story is what the next part called "Results" is all about.

After the six steps of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis were finished, the final set of themes and subthemes were put together in a way that makes sense and shows what the participants' daily experiences were about. The themes show the social and mental problems Afghan professionals who have fled to the United States face as they try to find professional and personal security in their new homes. The next section, "Results," goes into more depth about each theme and its related subthemes. Each theme is backed up by quotes from participants and interpretive comments that show how personal experiences are linked to bigger themes of meaning. These results give us a full picture of the difficult situations Afghan refugee workers face as they try to fit in and be strong in their new community.

## **Results**

This section is where the main ideas that came out of the phenomenological analysis of interviews with professionals who work with Afghan refugees are shown. The main ideas and subthemes listed below show how the participants' experiences were similar as they dealt with early resettlement, work problems, adjusting to American culture, and figuring out who they were in the country. Each theme is accompanied by

quotes from participants that show how deep and complicated these lived experiences were. These are then followed by interpretive explanations that show how the individual stories fit in with bigger psychological and social processes that were found in the analysis. Using Braun and Clarke's framework as a guide, the results give us a more complete picture of the struggles and strength that Afghan refugee professionals showed as they tried to rebuild stability, find their professional identities, and become part of their new communities.

### **Theme 1: Early Relocation Challenges and Obstacles to Social and Professional Integration**

When they first come to the United States, barriers that make it hard for them to start over in life and work are at the heart of this theme. Communication problems because they don't speak English well or don't know the local dialects make it harder for them to get to important resources and make it harder for them to connect with others. Misunderstandings about culture happen when the host society gets refugee behaviors or values wrong, which can lead to unintentional social exclusion or discrimination. In addition, embedded systemic inequalities make these problems worse by keeping people from fair opportunities for employment, benefits, and acceptance from society. Some refugees may say they had good experiences when they first got there, these early hopes are often dashed by the reality of navigating new cultural and institutional landscapes, especially the fact that it can be hard to get official recognition for the qualifications they earned abroad. Usually, this lack of recognition leads refugees to switch career. In

addition, it causes them not to make enough money, which hurts their professional image and makes it harder for them to fully integrate into society.

The people who took part also said that one of the hardest things about moving to the United States early was not having structured advice or job orientation during their first few months. They felt lost, confused, and financially unstable because they didn't know where to start with things like homes, jobs, or school. But over time, the support of people in the community, known Afghan families, and neighborhood resettlement agencies became very important in getting them through the hard times, restoring security, and boosting their confidence and more of these needed since Afghans refugees credential or prior job experiences are not accepted in America. The following subthemes show these events.

***Subtheme 1: Communication and Resources Barriers During Early Resettlement***

When they first move to here, Afghan refugees often have a hard time communicating because they don't speak English well or know how to use American conversation styles and systems. Access to community resources like healthcare, social welfare, education, and job services, housing is slowed down by these problems. When people can't clearly state their wants or understand complicated government procedures, they miss out on opportunities and feel more stressed. It is also hard for refugees to find the services they need unless some agencies are built to offer help introducing them to such a service. This lack of communication makes it harder for them to speak up for themselves and get all the help they need for a smooth shift. "The other issue was about the language barrier to finding the job. This is a big issue." (P8)

***Subtheme 2: Cultural Misunderstanding and Systemic Inequality***

Systemic inequalities that hurt Afghan refugees as they try to fit in are often caused by wrong readings of cultural behaviors and differences. Because people in the host society don't know much about Afghan social rules, they may be prejudiced, stereotyped, or left out. Misunderstandings about other cultures often show up as unconscious biases in the way institutions work and people talk to each other, which makes it harder for everyone to get fair treatment. Systemic inequalities show up as different levels of access to jobs, housing, health care, and schooling, which makes social stratification stronger. Because of this, there are unfair situations that hurt the economy and make refugees feel stressed, which lowers their confidence and sense of belonging.

There are certain things that we interpret differently than Americans. On those issues, I learned that difficult way, because when I said something, for example, thumbs up. It's a good thing in America. Thumbs up in my country is not a good thing. So, I had to learn all those things. By making mistake and seeing other people are laughing. (P1)

***Subtheme 3: Positive Beginning Followed by Adjustment Challenges***

Most Afghan refugees talk about how they were welcomed with open arms and hope when they first got settled in, with community outreach and help. But this good start is often followed by hard adjustments as they deal with the real-life problems that come with acculturation. Having to deal with strange social rules, regulatory challenges, and job-related obstacles can be frustrating and disheartening. When assumptions are different from what people actually experience during integration, it can influence their

psychological health and motivation. This theme shows how relocation is always changing, as early hopes must be weighed against the ongoing needs of adapting to a new culture and job. “We didn't see any problems at that time, but over time, you will understand the problems yourself, which are resettlement problems. We started life from scratch” (P1).

#### ***Subtheme 4: Challenges with Recognition of Foreign Education and Experiences***

Afghan refugee workers still face a lot of problems when they try to get their foreign credentials recognized. Many people with a lot of schooling and experience find that their skills aren't valued or are completely ignored in the American job market. Many people must work in jobs that don't suit their competencies or expertise because they don't get official recognition for them. This makes them underemployed and keeps their careers from moving forward. Evaluating credentials can take a long time, cost a lot of money, and be hard because different schools have different requirements. Because of this, refugees have trouble with money and low self-esteem at work, which can make it harder for them to fit in with their new communities and improve their mental health. “They value the internal experience. They don't value your background, your experience.” (P8)

#### ***Subtheme 5: Navigating Early Relocation and Employment Challenges Without Guidance***

The experiences of participants who entered the U.S. job market without guidance, mentorship, or knowledge of various career options are reflected in this subtheme. In the absence of official direction, many Afghan refugee professionals

reported feeling overburdened as they tried to comprehend new systems, find appropriate employment, and satisfy their financial needs. To support themselves and their families, participants frequently accepted any available job, regardless of their degree or professional background, in the absence of clear information regarding credential appraisal, job search tactics, or local workforce standards. A sense of professional displacement, emotional stress, and the need to start anew were all exacerbated by this absence of organized assistance.

I had to start from somewhere to you know, pay my bills and all that stuff. At the beginning, it was hard because I was never used to this kind of work that I started at the beginning. But by passing of the time, I got used to it, and then navigate around, Knowing other people. (P5)

***Subtheme 6: Overcoming Early Hardship Community and Agency Support***

Regardless of these early challenges, Afghan professionals who had to leave their homes often some of them discovered strength and hope when community members and local resettlement services helped them. Some participants also mentioned that problems like not being able to find work, language barriers, and not fully understanding American workplace norms were slowly solved with the help of Afghan community members, faith-based organizations, and resettlement staff. Already established families and other local networks often helped Afghan Refugees with practical things such as job searches, housing applications, and getting through the government's processes.

I participate in many. Job fairs events, but they were useless for us. Because what they're looking for we are not suitable for that. what we are looking for, they don't

accept us, or they don't offer us. I think for Afghans, they should establish a different structure and unfortunately, in most of the organization.

They should hire, like, a qualified Afghans or someone from the related country.

At least they know about the system, about the culture, and about the consequences.” (P8)

## **Theme 2: Getting Around American Workplace Customs and Cultural Expectations**

The second theme is about the steps and problems Afghan refugee workers face as they try to fit in with American workplace culture and culture in general. This theme emphasizes how important it is to understand new professional standards and social factors to help people successfully integrate into the workforce. Refugees must deal with new job organizational structures, communication styles, and cultural norms that are very different from what they are used to. During this time of adjustment, the theme also emphasizes how important it is to use employment abilities and ethnic community networks as points of support and guidance. These things affect how easy or hard it is for newcomers to deal with cultural disparities and meet job standards in the United States.

### ***Subtheme 1: Workplace Norms and Cultural Differences***

Afghan refugees who work in the United States often face big problems as they try to adjust to American workplace norms. Some of these problems are figuring out formal and informal conversation styles, how to be on time and productive, and how the workplace is organized. Differences in how people interact with each other and how respect and power are shown in different cultures can lead to confusion or discomfort.

New employees must learn how to follow unspoken professional rules, like how to make decisions as a group and give and receive feedback. This may be very different from the more formal or direct workplaces they were used to.

You asked a very important question. Adapting to the professional environment and work culture in America is one of the main challenges for refugees for example, when I started working, my manager expected me to be fast and clear. I thought that if I made a mistake, I would have to admit it. (P1)

***Subtheme 2: Support From Prior Experience and Afghan Community Networks***

Alternatively, professional education and previous experience that Afghan refugees already have are very helpful because they give them a base of skills and information that they can use in the U.S. workforce. On the other hand, informal support from Afghan community networks gives emotional support, useful information, and links to opportunities. Often, these networks help refugees understand the subtleties of American working culture and boost their confidence. Along with making acculturation easier, they also help people feel like they are fit and keep their identity.

It's different for us, as a professional who came to this country. It's easy to be adjusted, because you already know about the systems, and We work back home with people from here, and so we already know about the cultures, about the systems. (P8)

The third theme is ways to deal with stress and psychological changes that happen during moving.

### **Theme 3: Stress Reduction and Psychological Adjustment During Resettlement**

The theme 3, looked at the psychological and emotional experiences of Afghan refugee workers as they deal with the stressful parts of moving and adjusting to a new life. This study focuses on the different ways people deal with worry and keep their mental health strong when they face problems like cultural displacement, uncertainty, and job barriers. This theme emphasizes how important support networks, professional help, and flexible tactics are for maintaining mental health and adjusting well during the resettlement process.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Coping and Distraction Strategies***

Afghan refugees cope with stress in many ways, such as through hobbies, spiritual and religious practices, social interactions, and skills that take their minds off of things that make them anxious. These techniques are very important emotional buffers that help them keep their moods in check and keep going with their daily lives even when things get hard.

Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience, even for those who are successful professionally and personally. First, it's very difficult. We understand that relocation is a psychological shock even at the best of times. But we set goals for ourselves, we worked out, we followed TV shows, we made great friends, we were always in touch with our families, we were never idle, and even on our off days always going to the market, cooking, and cleaning the house with friends to pass the time. Because if we are home alone for a day, we think the

world has come to an end. We felt very lonely, our stress increased a lot and because of that, we are always busy with work. (P1)

***Subtheme 2: Support Systems and Coping Strategies During Resettlement***

Strong support systems, like family, neighborhood groups, religious groups, and professional agencies, give people basic emotional, social, and knowledge-based help. To make people feel less alone and powerless, these networks are very important for building resilience, giving people a feeling of belonging, and making it easier for them to get resources and certainly having more these types of assistance can be very helpful for their mental health.

It's kind of easier here. You don't have those barriers that you have back home.

Because the lack of job back home is kind of different. But, yeah, you have, like, the best thing in here, you have lots of opportunity. (P3)

***Subtheme 3: Emotional and Psychological Stress***

People who are moving often experience a lot of mental distress, such as anxiety, sadness, trauma, and problems with their identity. People in the investigation talk about dealing with loss, like losing a home, a social status, or something known from their culture. This can cause or make mental health problems worse, which shows how important it is for mental health interventions to be sensitive to different cultures. "Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience, even for those who are successful professionally and personally." (P1)

***Subtheme 4: Professional Guidance and Training***

Professional guidance and some training they received during resettlement for professional development give Afghan professionals who have fled their homes the tools and information they need to adapt in both their personal and professional lives. Training programs that focus on dealing with stress, getting used to the workplace, and sharing skills are necessary to promote long-term health and success in integration. “The Case worker took English and specialized classes in a field for us. While I worked in field, then we found the rest of the work ourselves” (P1).

***Subtheme 5: Transportation Challenges During Early Professional Adjustment***

For many professional Afghan refugees, getting a job after being resettled is a big step toward rebuilding their identity and security. What the participants did say, though, was that getting a job was just the start of more problems, especially with getting to work and getting used to it. Some refugees found it hard to get to work or to training programs and interviews because they couldn't rely on dependable transportation, in the first few months after they were resettled. A lot of people counted on public transportation to get to jobs that were far from cheap housing until they could buy a car or get their driver's license. However, many of them found it confusing or not good enough. “In here or western culture, the most difficult thing for me at the beginning was transportation because as you know now, as I know now, without a car Living is very difficult” (P4).

**Theme 4: Modifying Job Search Techniques and Getting Employment Information**

In general, it shows how quickly people need to adjust and how they need focused help to close the gap between their skills and the realities of the job market.

In addition, the fourth theme looks at how Afghan workers who have fled their home country change how they look for work after moving to the United States and how they get around the job market. It talks about how ways of looking for work have changed over time, such as how switching from casual community networks to online platforms changes how well people can find work. In the real world, this theme also includes problems like not having enough experience in the field, not knowing how to apply for jobs, and not having any established professional contacts that make it harder to find useful work.

***Subtheme 1: Job Search Networks and Online Platforms***

Traditional personal links in the Afghan community are still very important for getting information and emotional support. Afghan refugees look for work more through established community networks and new online job boards and they also help refugees find opportunities and get ready to apply for them. Digital employment websites, social media, and professional networking platforms like LinkedIn also have all become necessary ways to reach people outside of one's immediate community or ethnic group. However, getting good at using these sites requires learning new skills and being flexible.

When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application. And when we didn't know, we later followed various websites such as Indeed, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, department emails that usually publish job information or job search information, and sometimes we found a job from friends who had worked before and with their advice. (P1)

***Subtheme 2: Difficulty in Not Having Work Experience***

Many workers who were Afghan refugees said that not having worked in the U.S. before was one of the biggest problems they had getting jobs after they were resettled. Even though the participants had good educations and a lot of work experience from their home countries, they said that American companies often didn't take their credentials and work history from other countries seriously. Without working in the U.S. before or having professional contacts in the job market, refugees often had trouble getting employers to believe them or even getting interviews. It was stressful because they couldn't get a job without U.S. experience, but they also couldn't get experience without first having a job. "Without any prior job experiences. It's hard to get a job" (P4).

**Theme 5: Employment Integration Obstacles, Both Personal and Structural**

In theme 5 looked at the different personal and systemic problems that Afghan refugee workers face when they try to join the American workforce. This theme talks about how complicated laws, cultural differences at work, unstable economies, and trouble communicating all make it harder for Afghan refugees to find useful work and move up in their careers. This shows how these problems make it harder for refugees to keep up satisfying work and how important it is to have all-around support systems that consider different cultures.

***Subtheme 1: Inadequate Financial Help During Early Resettlement***

I didn't want to even take that. I wanted them to find me a job, help me find a job." (P4) Because of the lack of money, there was instant stress and uncertainty, and many refugees had to quickly find any job that was open, no matter what their skills or

career background were. People who took part talked about how hard it was on their emotions to balance urgent financial requirements with the difficulties of starting over in a new economic system. Not having enough early financial help not only made them less stable at first, but it also made it take longer for them to focus on their professional development and social integration. This theme shows how not having enough money at the start of resettlement can make it even harder for Afghan workers who have fled their homes to rebuild their lives. “The state I was living was not that great in providing support for refugees either. I was getting only small financial support for a month. For a few months.”

***Subtheme 2: Economic and Housing Hardship***

Financial instability and unstable housing conditions make getting a job even more stressful, and refugees often must put their immediate needs for survival ahead of their career growth. Being poor makes it harder to get to work, buy business clothes, and get job training, which further limits your chances of moving up.

I try to study some... professional, new professional. I paid, you know, for a course in a professional field in a university for many months.

And the fees were paid on my own. I had some, you know, saving. After getting a degree from university. I applied, probably. For dozens of companies. (P7)

***Subtheme 4: Work Culture and Communication Barriers***

English skills and not knowing how to talk to people at work make it harder to participate and move up in business settings. In the workplace, miscommunication can

make it harder for everyone to fit in, lead to more mistakes or misunderstandings, and get in the way of performance reviews or networking, which is necessary for movement.

Especially me being the responsible person, I must be home at a certain time so we could all eat together. It impacts my work, because they want me to stay longer and help. But I can't because I must come home and help with the family and then for professional, I think again, just not really being able to connect to a lot of the people at work there because we all grew up so differently. (P9)

#### ***Subtheme 5: Cultural Adjustment and Workplace Comfort***

Refugees' sense of belonging and confidence are hurt by the mental stress of getting used to a new culture and job. Employees may withdraw socially or do poorly at work if they don't feel culturally safe or relaxed. This makes integration less likely to work.

#### ***Subtheme 6: Professional Guidance Needs in Resettlement***

Refugees often can't get the professional growth and mentoring that is specifically designed to help them with their distinctive cultural, linguistic, and career issues. Getting good advice is important for recognizing credentials, looking for work, and adapting to new situations at work. "And in a foreign country, you start from scratch; you definitely need someone to guide you" (P1).

#### ***Subtheme 7: Confidence and Self-Efficacy Challenges***

Consistent unemployment, discrimination, and problems adjusting make refugees less confident, which lowers their motivation and belief in their own abilities to reach their job goals.

If you want to do a good job, or get a good payment, you must do something like you have to do some certifications, you must go through some training. These are the big things. I mean, the source of that. Provide you with money for the training. These are the big things, like, kind of the barriers for me and the United States.

(P3)

***Subtheme 8: Misjudgment of Skills and Qualifications Exaggerated***

Stereotypical biases and misunderstandings among companies often make skill gaps seem bigger than they really are, which can lead to unfair hiring, promotion, and training opportunities.

The third thing is, like, sometimes they call you overqualified, but when you don't ask my credential, why you call me overqualified. Because you already do not recognize my... credential, so when you don't recognize it, they over qualification term is like not true. (P8)

***Subtheme 9: Underrecognition of Skills and Experiences***

Wrong assumptions and not recognizing official credentials make it so that refugees' skills and abilities are not fully utilized in the work force, which negatively impacts their long-term economic integration. "At first, they thought I couldn't do the work I started. When I was out of work for a few weeks, they realized that I could work and sent me a thank you note" (P1).

## **Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity and Adapting to the American Workforce**

The sixth theme shows how hard it is for Afghan professionals who have fled their home country to rebuild their professional personalities and get used to the American job market. This theme respects the emotional, mental, and financial problems refugees face as they try to start over in a new country and find work, where their past successes might not directly translate. When looking at how feelings of not being valued and unstable economies affect the identity and drive of refugees trying to get back to work, this research highlights the connection between personal well-being and professional reintegration.

### ***Subtheme 1: Economic Instability and Perceived Undervaluation***

Many Afghan refugee workers have trouble with their finances because they can't find work or are hired for jobs that don't match their skills and qualifications. This unstable economy often makes people feel undervalued at work and in social situations, which lowers their self-worth and can make stress and mental health problems worse.

You have to continue your education, you have to like start going to the university, like, it's hard, because they said, you have to like have your degree from USA and it's very hard for a Professional working in fast food places, or I know job is job, but it is hard. (P2)

### ***Subtheme 2: Career Transition and Adjustment***

It takes a lot of adjustment to make through work changes that are caused by problems with credential recognition or barriers in the job market. Many times, refugees

have to learn new skills, accept that their job paths will change, or move into industries they aren't familiar with. All these situations require them to be flexible and strong. "I realized that my income was not enough, and my partner at that time had to quit the specific classes to work so we could pay our bills and take care of our kids" (P6).

***Subtheme 3: Emotional and Confidence Struggles in the Workplace***

Some Afghan Refugees don't know how to receive emotional support or any help. For Afghan Refugees low confidence and identity crises, are common during the process of professional recovery. When refugees feel like their previous skills are being ignored, they may feel ashamed, frustrated, or doubtful of themselves. This makes it hard for them to stand out in new professional roles. "During those years, either there were not much emotional help or assistance, or maybe I didn't know how to reach them" (P6).

***Subtheme 4: Barriersto Professional Integration and Recognition***

Barriers in the workplace, like not accepting certificates from other countries and limiting accessibility to professional networks, make it harder for everyone to join the workforce. It's hard for refugees to build professional credibility and earn employers' trust, which makes it harder for them to move up in their careers and grow in the long run. "You know, the qualification that you had in Afghanistan, or whatever work you have been doing there. But those skills and qualifications were not recognized here in U.S." (P5).

**Theme 7: The Function of Support Systems in Social and Emotional Adjustment**

The seventh theme shows how important cultural, social, economic, medical, and professional support networks are for the mental health and ability of Afghan

professionals to adjust to new places while they are resettled. The main idea of this theme is that these supports have a big effect on refugees' mental health, their ability to fit in with their new communities, and their general ability to adjust. It says that the availability and quality of different support services and networks can help or hurt emotional stability and adapting to new environments.

***Subtheme 1: Social and Cultural Connection Support***

Family, ethnic communities, and faith-based groups with strong social and cultural ties give refugees a crucial feeling of belonging, identity stability, and emotional grounding. These links offer practical help, cultural acceptance, and emotional support, easing the stresses of change and being alone that come with moving.

Relocation is not just a physical displacement. It is profound cultural, emotional, and social change. Therefore, no person, no matter how strong, can truly progress without real support. For example, the only thing that saved us during our years of relocation was good people who supported us not only with work and some things so that we wouldn't feel lonely. Support is not just a face, it is an experience, and we had this experience. (P1)

***Subtheme 2: Lack of Support With Medical and Financial Assistance***

Access to medical care and financial help isn't enough or there are gaps in it that make people more vulnerable, take longer to recover from trauma, and make it harder to stabilize. Many refugees have trouble getting healthcare that is sensitive to their culture and long-term financial means, which hurts their mental and physical health.

I didn't have any help with medical expenses, and I didn't approve for medical expenses, and my husband had a good salary, but this is not enough for my kids. He had to support some of his family in his country back home, and I had a part-time job, I was sick, I couldn't work, like, full-time. Because I have kids and I was expecting. There were many challenges. We needed support. (P2)

### ***Subtheme 3: Job Hunting by Contacting Stores Shops***

Several participants said that the first thing they did to look for work was go to stores, restaurants, and small companies in their area and ask if there were any job openings. Because they didn't know how to use online job applications or formal hiring systems, many people depended on asking people directly in person as their main way to look for work. This method was often used because people didn't have access to technology or wanted to show their reason in person. Some people were able to get temporary or entry-level jobs through these attempts, but others were turned down or had problems with the language. Despite these problems, this hands-on approach to job hunting showed how persistent and determined Afghan refugees were to find work and start rebuilding their lives as soon as they arrived in the new country. "When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application" (P1).

### ***Subtheme 4: Social Services and Financial Assistance***

A big part of making it easier for people to move is making sure that social services like language classes, childcare and help with living are available and easy to get

to. These programs help ease the practical stresses of refugees' lives so they can focus on adjusting and getting back to work, which is good for their mental health.

Actually, the support that I got was Like, mostly from Friends, government also, like, social services. They provided me, like, some money for the courses and stuff and, I like the environment of the United States. They are very supportive. The people that I saw around, Kind of compared to other countries that I heard from my friends they are very, supportive, and they support you on everything. Like, if you go a new job. (P3)

***Subtheme 5: Institutional and Language Support***

Refugees' confidence and ability to communicate are boosted by institutional support like language learning programs and culture orientation. Access to jobs, health care, and social networks is improved by these tools, which helps with long-term adjustment.

The community colleges and these things should, like, helped a lot too, like, if you go there as a refugee, they will provide you some program with the language and everything. I found it very useful for my family, for my partner and everything. I would say that that's a big thing, and big move for the refugees. (P3)

**Theme 8: Adapting Communication in the Workplace and Preserving Cultural Identity**

Theme 8 shows how important it is for Afghan workers who have fled their home country to change the way they talk to others to deal with cultural differences at work. They must find a way to keep their cultural identity while also being able to communicate

well in new professional settings. The main idea of this theme shows that communication adaptation is more than just changing words. It also includes navigating different cultures in a way that affects how people work together, feel included, and do their best.

***Subtheme 1: Cultural and Professional Transition***

To meet the new requirements in school and at work, people must get past differences in language skills, ways of talking to each other, and expectations for giving and receiving comments. It can be hard for Afghan refugees to match up their old training with what is expected of them now, so they must keep learning and adjusting. “In this culture that may be very much welcome and acceptable here and, we have to learn to allow our family members to adapt this culture and be open-minded to be acceptable in this society” (P6).

***Subtheme 2: Workplace Integration and Social Adjustment***

Effective communication is a key part of integrating refugees into the workplace because it helps them make friends, show their professional skills, and fully participate. Communication that promotes cultural respect and mutual understanding within teams makes it easier for people to change to new social situations.

First of all, every job I started, and we've worked in many places so far, the accents are very different. For a week or two, I didn't understand what people were asking me, or they didn't understand when I was talking to them. Over time, I got used to it. Talking with them in their accent, their way of asking questions, and then they became normal to me. (P1)

### ***Subtheme 3: Cultural Identity and Media Influence***

The way refugees express themselves and talk to others is affected by their national identity and the stories that are told in the media. Maintaining heritage culture while also fitting in with popular norms requires careful negotiation, which may include hiding or changing things that show who you are.

Due to media propaganda and the lack of knowledge and information.

Afghanistan always shows up as a country of conflict, as a country of war, and the people think that they are not like modern people there is no education, but it's not true.

We have lots of qualified and very educated people and if we compare that with the neighborhood countries those people from those countries, they find themselves in this country. But Afghans have two problems. At first, their community, and second, the systems they don't recognize them. (P8)

### ***Subtheme 4: Communication Barriers and Adaptation Strategies***

Because of language barriers and misunderstandings, adaptive communication strategies have been created. These include language learning tools, using body language, and asking for more information. These plans help refugees deal with problems and make the workplace a better place for everyone.

Specifically, communication style, I think it's very different now, because. Your kind of must be very cold. The way that you speak, you can't really be friends with your coworkers, you must have a balance between being friends, and then also just maintaining a work relationship. I think here it's you have you to just, I

wasn't very aware of that, so when I got this job now, I must like be very careful of how you word things, and so I think that's one of the ways that I've Modified my communication style. (P9)

### **Theme 9: Handling Social Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Afghan Identity at Work**

This theme investigates the complicated ways that Afghan refugee workers see and deal with their Afghan identity at work. It talks about how racial and national stereotypes affect interactions, lead to discrimination, and hurt relationships at work. The theme shows how discrimination becomes normalized and internalized over time, as well as the ways that refugees deal with, fight, or adapt to these problems. These ways show how they negotiate their identities, their resilience, and their ability to fit in with their new community.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Normalization and Acceptance of Discrimination***

Over time, discriminatory actions and views have become accepted as part of daily work life for many Afghan refugees. Acceptance, which is often a way to deal with stress, shows how persistent bias is and can cause people to internalize shame and lower their standards for fair treatment. “The experience of discrimination or injustice of many refugees, especially Afghans, is real but hidden, not obvious, but I feel and think that this discrimination is a natural thing and in every country” (P1).

#### ***Subtheme 2: In Integration, Self-Advocacy and Positive Engagement Are Important***

Several of the participants said that they never personally encountered discrimination at work or in their neighborhoods. They instead stressed the importance of clear communication, kindness, and explanations to clear up any confusion before it got

worse. By being open about their culture, values, and goals, these people earned the respect and understanding of their coworkers and people in the community. This proactive and optimistic outlook shows a type of self-advocacy and perseverance that helps people fit in better with their new surroundings. These participants didn't see themselves as being left out; instead, they saw interactions with people from other cultures as chances to learn and make connections, which helped build confidence and collaboration in their new surroundings. "I'm an Afghan I don't feel bad I feel proud. I explain myself to them, and I did not see any reactions, bad reactions, from them in society. So, I did not face that" (P10).

### ***Subtheme 3: Stereotyping and Identity Concealment***

According to some refugees, they hide or change things that make them look like they are Afghan to avoid being stereotyped or treated unfairly. Changing who you are can protect you from discrimination, but it can also make them feel alone or like they've lost their national identity. "It is so extreme, especially in the late years. Sometimes I'm even hesitant to mention where I am or what religion I follow." (P6)

### **Theme 10: Discrimination at Work and Psychological Coping Mechanisms**

This theme looks at how Afghan refugee workers deal with discrimination and bigotry at work, as well as the different ways they find to deal with and get past these problems. This theme emphasizes the emotional and professional harm caused by discrimination, showing that there are no official institutional protections and highlighting the personal strength shown by refugees. It shows that discrimination hurts more than just mental health. It also hurts job security and professional advancement.

***Subtheme 1: Experiences of Discrimination***

People talk about different kinds of discrimination, from overt bias and being left out to more subtle forms of bullying called "microaggressions." Such events can make people feel less confident, more alone, and more likely to experience mental discomfort, which can make it harder to adjust to a new job. "Applying for a job there you're really qualified for that job, but they don't really consider because I feel like that, but I don't believe that that's the case" (P5).

***Subtheme 2: Coping and Resolution Strategies***

To deal with their problems, Afghan refugees do many things, such as making friends, looking for social support, doing well at work to fight stereotypes, and at times avoiding arguments fighting to keep their jobs. These reactions show that people have control and can bounce back from bad situations.

I made sure to meet my goals. To cooperate, to perform very well, to have best attendance and, my knowledge and performance saved me from any bigotry. I achieved the levels where I wanted to achieve because of my action. I didn't focus on how other people treated me. I made sure to provide performance and efficiency in my work. To anyone who intentionally wanted to do something, they changed their mind. I think my actions played a big role in avoiding that. (P6)

**Summary of the Findings**

This part showed the main ideas that came out of Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis of interviews with professionals who work with Afghan refugees. The results, which are broken down into ten main themes and several subthemes, show how

difficult, complicated, and time-consuming it can be for these people to get used to life in the United States, make friends at work, adjust to new cultures, deal with mental health issues, and figure out who they are.

The results show that the first part of moving is hard because of things like language hurdles, problems getting to resources, misunderstandings about culture, systemic unfairness, and problems getting foreign credentials recognized. These problems at the start set the stage for long-term problems with finding work, figuring out one's professional personality, and fitting in with others. As soon as the participants started working in the United States, they ran into cultural norms, communication rules, and hierarchical systems that they had to keep getting used to. Many of them were able to get around in these new places with the help of their professional skills and Afghan community networks.

These themes also show that psychological stress, mental strain, and trying to cope are very important during resettlement. Participants talked about using different ways to deal with stress and stay busy, getting help from family and community networks, and dealing with mental health problems that came up because of moving, not knowing what the future holds, and having unstable jobs. Professional help, training materials, and social support were found to be very important for both mental health and adjusting to a new job.

The results show that there are big structural and systemic problems, like economic hardship, limited access to professional mentorship, skills not being recognized, communication problems, and problems adjusting to a new culture, that make

it hard for refugees to find meaningful work. These obstacles make people less confident, keep them from moving up in their careers, and keep them unemployed for a long time. It was said that rebuilding a professional identity was hard on the emotions because of feelings of not being valued enough, messed up career paths, and having to adjust to new facts in the job market.

Support from friends, family, and institutions became important for a person's ability to change. Strong ties to family and community, easy access to financial and social services, language support programs, and organizations that understood and respected different cultures all helped participants deal with stress and adapt better. In contrast, gaps in financial aid, healthcare access, and mental support services made problems worse and made it harder to fit in with others.

Adapting to communication and negotiating one's identity were also important parts of the subjects' experiences. To fit in at work and escape being stereotyped, many changed the way they talked, wrote, and showed who they were. The emotional and professional costs of bias at work are shown by themes linked to discrimination, whether it is accepted, ignored, or directly dealt with. Participants often found their own ways to deal with these situations, formed relationships, or depended on community support to get through them, showing resilience despite problems with the system.

In general, the ten themes show how personal choice, psychological strength, navigating cultural differences, and structure limitations all affect each other in complex ways. The real-life experiences of Afghan refugee workers show both the hard times and the strengths that help them adapt that shape their paths to integration. These results give

us a full picture of the social, psychological, and professional problems Afghan refugee professionals face as they try to find security, belonging, and independence in their new places of residence.

The main ideas that came out of the real-life experiences of Afghan professionals who had to move to the United States and deal with resettlement, workplace integration, cultural adaptation, and figuring out who they were given in Chapter 4. These results show how human strength, structural barriers, and social and cultural factors all worked together to shape the participants' paths to stability and belonging.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Ten Afghan refugee professionals who were relocated in the United States were the subject of this qualitative phenomenological study, the results of which are interpreted in this chapter. Participants were drawn from a variety of disciplines, such as education, psychology, engineering, computer science, and medicine. This study's main goal was to comprehend the professional, social, and psychological difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals as they integrate. Through the application of Lazarus and Folkman's Stress Appraisal and Coping Model and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, this chapter links the participant narratives to more general theoretical and empirical frameworks. Conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for further study, application, and constructive social change are also covered.

The results showed ten broad themes that reflected the multifaceted and intricate difficulties Afghan professionals encounter when they are resettled. Early relocation obstacles, reestablishing one's professional identity, cultural adjustment, communication adaptation, and encounters with prejudice encounters are a few examples. As they rebuilt their lives, frequently starting from scratch due to the absence of institutional assistance and the lack of recognition of their foreign qualifications, participants discussed both suffering and resiliencies.

## **Analysis of the Results**

### **Theme 1: Difficulties With Early Relocation and Integration Barriers**

Participants characterized the early migration phase as one of uncertainty, stress, and confusion. Many had great expectations for stability and work when they arrived in the United States, but some of them were faced with little information and little guidance. One of the most pressing issues was a communication barrier. Limited English proficiency impeded access to healthcare, education, employment, and housing, according to several participants. Others reported feeling alone due to the absence of organized support networks like job placement services or orientation programs.

Participants also underlined that it felt like starting over "from scratch" when they moved to the United States. Since degrees and work experience obtained in Afghanistan were frequently not accepted, people were forced to change careers or obtain new certificates in order to make money fast. The COR Theory's description of resource loss was exacerbated by structural inequalities, lack of direction, and language difficulties. Some participants claimed that although they had fewer communication problems, people who were already accustomed to American culture or English still had to deal with significant resettlement challenges such as unstable housing and transportation. These results strongly align with the research on refugee adjustment, which regularly highlights the significant loss of resources experienced by Afghan refugees during early resettlement, including financial stability, professional position, and social networks (Alemi et al., 2023; UNHCR, 2023). According to earlier research, language barriers, interrupted careers, and a lack of structured support exacerbate psychological suffering

and impede integration, just like participants in our study (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). The reliance on unofficial community networks mentioned by a few participants is also consistent with previous research that indicates Afghan refugees significantly depend on the assistance of their ethnic communities to mitigate the stress of early migration (Aleml et al., 2023).

These experiences reflect the loss of vital resources, including social networks, professional identity, and job security, which can lead to psychological distress, in line with COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals in recovering these assets underscore the need for outside support networks in preventing the depletion of resources. Early resettlement recipients who received assistance from Afghan families or community organizations reported feeling more confident and recovering more quickly.

## **Theme 2: Creating Awareness Around American Workplace Culture**

In the American workplace, participants experienced communication style variations and cultural misunderstandings. Some observed that coworkers or superiors frequently misconstrued assertiveness, body language, or cultural expressions. American business customs including direct feedback, self-promotion, and informality were foreign to many. The shift was less difficult for a few individuals who had already been exposed to Western society, but they still struggled to meet the new standards for performance reviews, teamwork, and timeliness.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), these difficulties are ongoing cognitive assessments of the demands of the circumstance and the coping mechanisms that are at one's disposal. Compared to those who exclusively utilized avoidance techniques, participants who employed problem-focused coping techniques such as looking for mentorship, enhancing communication, or participating in training adapted more successfully. According to the larger body of research on the integration of refugees into the workforce, cultural incongruence and misreading communication styles frequently result in misunderstandings and role stress for refugee professionals (Sifat et al., 2024). These experiences are in line with this research. Afghan professionals frequently struggle with American standards of self-promotion and direct communication, which are very different from collectivist Afghan values, according to earlier research (Baumgartner et al., 2024). The findings that skill development, mentoring, and active learning enhance workplace adaption for refugee professionals are consistent with the participants' use of problem-focused coping (Rai et al., 2023).

### **Theme 3: Managing Stress and Adapting Psychologically**

One persistent problem was psychological stress, especially in the first few months after resettlement. Participants talked about how loneliness, uncertainty, and unstable finances might induce emotional anguish. Some stayed occupied with volunteer activities, school, or employment as a coping mechanism. Others were hopeful. Individuals, who received professional assistance, including free English lessons, training for job preparedness, reported better mental health and adjustment. This is consistent with previous studies found that Afghan refugees experiencing early relocation experience

high levels of anxiety, sadness, and identity disturbance (Kantor et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024). According to Alemi et al. (2023), the coping mechanisms that the participants reported, including remaining occupied, getting help, or going back to school, are also in line with earlier research showing that organized activities and community involvement foster psychological stability. The emphasis on meaning-making and resilience is consistent with the literature on refugee mental health, which highlights adaptive coping as a means of achieving emotional healing (Orang et al., 2023).

#### **Theme 4: Adaptation to Job Searches and Employment Access**

Participants clarified that a total shift in approach was necessary to obtain work in the United States. Online job applications, networking on websites like LinkedIn, and in-person visits to nearby businesses have supplanted traditional word-of-mouth recommendations. Due to the lack of employer recognition or feedback, many people considered these procedures to be perplexing or demoralizing. While some participants gradually learned how to use internet systems, others went to stores or restaurants to ask directly about job possibilities.

Many participants talked about going to small businesses or local stores to inquire directly about work, demonstrating how their limited access to conventional employment systems forced them to use unofficial means. Others didn't start utilizing Glassdoor and LinkedIn until they were introduced by community mentors. A number of them described going to several job fairs but failing because the employers didn't value their foreign experience or demanded "U.S. experience." Stempel and Alemi (2021) discovered that

structural prejudice still restricts the upward mobility of refugee professionals, which is consistent with this pattern.

One of the biggest obstacles was the lack of work experience in the United States. Participants lamented the undervaluation of their previous professional experience, which led them to accept entry-level or low-paying jobs. These incidents support the claim made by COR Theory that work is a material and psychological resource, and that losing it upsets one's sense of security, identity, and status (Hobfoll, 1989). These results support earlier research showing that Afghan refugee professionals often encounter structural obstacles to employment, such as employers' undervaluation of foreign credentials and lack of U.S. experience (Stempel & Alemi, 2021; Sifat et al., 2024). Additionally, studies reveal that it can be particularly difficult for Afghan refugee professionals to shift to online employment platforms and navigate intricate recruiting procedures (Gladwell et al., 2024). Participants' displeasure is consistent with research showing that underemployment leads to psychological stress and identity loss (Alemi et al., 2023), demonstrating the applicability of COR Theory in explaining these experiences.

#### **Theme 5: Individual and Systemic Obstacles to Workplace Integration**

Several individuals discussed being stuck in a never-ending cycle of "starting over." They had to reenter school or obtain temporary certifications in order to continue their education, as their international credentials were not accepted. Despite not having their credentials verified, several people thought they were "overqualified." Others talked about the difficulty of striking a balance between short-term financial requirements and long-term professional objectives. Transportation issues were often brought up by

participants, especially when residing in places with unreliable public transportation, which restricted employment options. Afghan professionals had identity issues, emotional tiredness, and diminished motivation as a result of the lack of support and acknowledgment. According to Kurt et al. (2023), these trends closely mirror findings from earlier studies that demonstrated Afghan refugees frequently find themselves caught in a cycle of repeated credentialing and re-schooling since their international qualifications are not recognized. Participants' reports of financial and transportation difficulties also mirror larger systemic impediments noted in studies on refugee integration (UNHCR, 2023). The emotional exhaustion and identity conflict that participants reported are consistent with previous research showing that a large portion of the psychological anguish that refugee professionals face is caused by systemic impediments rather than personal shortcomings (Alemi et al., 2023).

Another layer of difficulty was caused by transportation barriers. Participants sometimes experienced trouble getting to employment or training locations in locales without dependable public transportation, especially before they could afford a car. Financial strains caused several families to postpone professional training or schooling, demonstrating how material scarcity exacerbates psychological stress. Others found that while community or religious organizations offered some temporary respite, they fell short in addressing systemic impediments to employment.

### **Theme 6: Rebuilding Professional Identity**

Rebuilding one's professional identity turned out to be one of the most difficult and painful tasks. Those who had previously worked as engineers, doctors, or teachers

expressed their dissatisfaction with their unrelated entry-level jobs. Many said they felt underappreciated and questioned their skills and purpose. According to recent research, one of the most psychological issues for Afghan refugee professionals is losing their professional identity, which is frequently associated with feelings of pessimism, melancholy, and low self-esteem (Alemi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024). Nonetheless, some participants' rephrasing and pursuit of new jobs aligns with studies that demonstrate the psychological benefits and increased long-term stability of refugees who pursue retraining or other career trajectories (Rai et al., 2023). Others, on the other hand, reframed these difficulties as chances for development and pursued new professions in business administration, behavioral health, or information technology.

#### **Theme 7: Social Adjustment and Support Networks**

The importance of local agencies, faith-based groups, and community networks was often emphasized by participants. People who got assistance from friends, received language support, or community mentors reported easier adjustments. According to earlier research, refugees who have strong community networks integrate more easily and have better mental health outcomes (Baumgartner et al., 2024). This finding is clearly supported by this data. According to studies conducted specifically in Afghanistan, support networks based on faith and community greatly lower stress and improve resilience during resettlement (Alemi et al., 2023). The participants' reports of limited access to childcare, healthcare, or financial support also align with more general findings that resource scarcity raises psychological load and prevents effective transition

(UNHCR, 2023). On the other hand, stress and instability were prolonged in the absence of easily accessible childcare, financial aid, or healthcare.

### **Theme 8: Cultural Identity and Communication Adaptation**

Afghan professionals stated that in order to maintain their cultural identity, they had to modify their communication skills. Many observed that Afghan communication norms prioritized indirection and modesty, whereas American workplace norms were more direct and independent. This cultural disparity frequently resulted in misconceptions or ideas of passivity. This result is in line with studies showing that while assimilating into Western business culture, Afghan immigrants must negotiate notable cultural differences in communication preferences (Sifat et al., 2024). Previous studies also show that Afghan professionals frequently have difficulty striking a balance between American expectations of assertiveness and cultural modesty, which results in misunderstandings similar to what participants described (Gladwell et al., 2024). The patterns found in this study are supported by literature, which also demonstrates that effective adaptation entails combining modern communication techniques with cultural values (Orang et al., 2023). In order to adapt, participants learned how to respect cultural values while expressing themselves more directly and confidently. Many eventually managed to strike a balance between cultural preservation and inclusion.

### **Theme 9: Handling Afghan Identity and Stereotypes**

Some individuals said that their nationality or religion caused them to feel stereotyped or misunderstood. Some talked about subtle prejudices that resulted in preconceptions about competence or exclusion. Others used professionalism, cultural

knowledge, and self-advocacy as coping mechanisms. Numerous studies of Afghan and Middle Eastern refugees have documented the existence of bias as reported by participants, who often experience discrimination based on cultural stereotypes, nationality, and religion (Hosseini et al., 2024). The use of cultural competency and professionalism to fight stereotypes is consistent with other research that found refugees frequently rely on relationship-building and self-advocacy to challenge unfavorable presumptions (Baumgartner et al., 2024). According to Lazarus and Folkman's model, which identifies emotional and cognitive coping as crucial reactions to discrimination, these adaptive strategies are consistent with research (Finlay & Gough, 2008). Over time, they gained respect and lessened prejudice by encouraging intercultural communication and doing a good job at their jobs. These actions show resilience as an adaptive reaction to discrimination and are consistent with the idea of emotion-focused coping as proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

### **Theme 10: Rebuilding Confidence and Handling Discrimination**

Participants described how prejudice, however subtle at times, impacted their mental health and sense of belonging. Many opted to put more emphasis on professional development and self-improvement than conflict. They saw constructive participation, knowledge, and perseverance as means of overcoming stigma. Discrimination, whether overt or covert, impairs confidence and causes psychological distress, according to studies on Afghan refugees (Kantor et al., 2023). Participants' focus on professional development, resilience, and self-improvement is in line with studies that indicates refugees frequently increase their personal effort in response to discrimination and look

for validation through accomplishment (Orang et al., 2023). These answers are in line with the framework of the COR Theory, which states that the emotional toll of discrimination is lessened when lost psychological resources like self-esteem and recognition are restored (Hobfoll, 1989). These results support the COR theory by demonstrating that the psychological effects of discrimination can be lessened by regaining lost resources, such as recognition and self-respect.

### **Relevance to the Literature**

The results of this study are in good agreement with the body of knowledge about acculturation stress, refugee integration, and the difficulties faced by Afghan refugee professionals in restarting their careers. Prior studies have consistently shown that during resettlement, refugee professionals face psychological and structural obstacles, such as difficulty accessing their credentials, difficulty communicating in their new language, loss of social networks, and unfamiliarity with workplace norms in their new country (Alemi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2024). These patterns are reflected in the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in this study, supporting the multifaceted and intricate nature of refugee adaptation as previously recorded by other researchers.

The themes that arose from this investigation also corroborate previous research that highlights the psychological toll that resource loss takes. Refugees frequently lose vital personal and social resources, such as cultural belonging, economic stability, family support, and professional identity, according to research on forced migration. These factors add up to psychological distress and a decline in well-being (UNHCR, 2023; Kantor et al., 2023). In line with these findings, participants described feelings of

irritation, identity disturbance, and emotional tiredness, emphasizing how stress during relocation is increased by losing one's professional status and having to start "from scratch."

The results provide more evidence of how cultural displacement influences refugees' adjustment. According to Groen et al. (2018) and Kurt et al. (2023), scholars have observed that refugees from collectivist communities frequently find it difficult to fit in with more individualistic cultures, which can result in feelings of loneliness, cultural disconnection, and internal conflict. Accounts from research participants illustrate this contradiction, with many describing the difficulty of balancing Afghan cultural values with American employment demands. That cultural identity management and professional adaptation are intertwined processes rather than distinct experiences is supported by this research.

The literature also affirms the value of mentorship, social support, and community in assisting refugees with their readjustment. According to studies, social networks—whether they be familial, cultural, or community-based—help people cope with stress by offering them practical assistance, emotional stability, and informational direction (Alemi et al., 2023; Orang et al., 2023). This study's participants agreed with these conclusions, often attributing their initial years in the US to the assistance of the Afghan community, resettlement organizations, or religious organizations. This agreement supports the claim that community-based and relational ties are necessary for integration to take place.

By using the Stress Appraisal Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory to the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals, this study significantly

advances the body of literature. Participants' reported major psychological effects of losing resources, including social belonging, financial stability, and professional identity, are contextualized by the COR Theory (Hobfoll, 1989). According to the findings, resource loss has a greater impact than resource gain, and cumulative losses can result in "loss spirals," which many participants directly defined as continuous cycles of stress, discouragement, and emotional strain. These findings are consistent with the COR Theory. In addition to providing a perspective through which to view variations in adaptation outcomes, the Stress Appraisal Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains how participants assessed these stressors and selected coping mechanisms. This model predicts that participants who felt they had access to training, assistance, or supervision were more likely to reframe stressors as challenges than threats.

This study adds to the literature by demonstrating how cultural identification, resource availability, and psychological appraisal all work together to influence refugee adaptation by fusing these theoretical viewpoints with actual experiences. This study illustrates how economic integration and mental health outcomes are interconnected, whereas previous research frequently separates the two. It is impossible to isolate the psychological health of Afghan refugee professionals from their work experiences, cultural identity negotiation, or social support networks. Both internal cognitive evaluations and external systemic elements influence adaptation, which is a highly dynamic process, as their stories demonstrate.

Overall, by providing a comprehensive, theoretically based analysis of the adaptation of Afghan refugee professionals, this study adds to the expanding body of literature. It's just an economic one.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Every qualitative study includes built-in constraints that affect how the results should be perceived and used. In order to fully document their lived experiences rather than extrapolating results to the whole Afghan refugee population, this phenomenological study concentrated on ten Afghan professionals who had relocated to the United States. The results are context-specific and only apply to this small cohort, even though the study offers comprehensive insights into professional integration. The following limitations point to areas where care should be taken when interpreting the findings and where more research could deepen our understanding. For both academic interpretation and real-world implementation, it is imperative to acknowledge these constraints. The limitations listed below must be noted:

#### **Sample Size and Range**

Despite the rich and varied narratives from ten individuals, representativeness is limited by the sample size. The study's small sample size restricts its representativeness, even though the ten participants' detailed narratives are compelling. The experiences of these people might not fully represent the variety of Afghan refugee professionals in other states, occupations, or localities. Diverse relocation experiences that were not included in this study may be discovered by increasing participation across professional domains. Although qualitative research stresses in-depth comprehension, the capacity to

make more generalizations is constrained by a small sample size. Recognizing that these results offer specific individual viewpoints rather than general trends is crucial.

Future research should increase the sample size to include people from different professional sectors, and community backgrounds, according to the recommendations for further study and application. Finding the culturally specific and universal adaptation strategies may be aided by comparative studies with different refugee populations. Researcher understanding of how institutional, social, and geographical circumstances influence professional integration would be possible through multi-site studies. Even with qualitative designs, expanding the variety of participants may improve the findings' application and relevance. The results of these initiatives may strengthen the case for laws and initiatives that assist refugee professionals.

### **Language and Interpretation Limitations**

English was spoken as a second or third language by a few participants. Although clarifications were used to assure appropriate meaning, it's possible that any small linguistic or cultural nuances were overlooked. This is consistent with the ethical and interpretive difficulties of cross-linguistic research, as highlighted by Sanjari et al. (2014). It is also possible that participants' comfort levels, the depth of their responses, or their willingness to discuss delicate experiences were impacted by language obstacles. Understanding the circumstances around the data collection requires an awareness of these difficulties.

### **Personal Accounts of Experiences**

In order to verify long-term results, this study depended on participants' subjective recollections and perceptions, which are essential to phenomenological research but have limitations. The accuracy of experiences recounted by participants may be impacted by recall bias, emotional factors, or social desirability. It is hard to tell if these experiences stay the same or evolve over time without observational or longitudinal data. The scope of findings is limited because the study purposefully concentrated on professional integration rather than more general family dynamics, community involvement, or policy consequences. Although a thorough examination of career-related adaptation was made possible by this focus, the results' applicability to other facets of refugee life is limited.

### **Recommendations for Further Study and Implementation**

Understanding the long-term adaptation, professional growth, and psychosocial well-being of Afghan refugee professionals should be the primary goals of future studies. Studies that follow these people over time after being resettled could examine how their identities change, including the coping strategies they adopt, the professional resources they obtain, and the methods they employ to function in social and professional settings. These kinds of studies would shed light on the short-term and long-term difficulties associated with integration.

Analyses that compare various refugee groups could shed more light on adaptation tactics that are both culturally unique and broadly applicable. Certain coping strategies or professional obstacles, for instance, can be typical of refugee populations, but others

might be specific to Afghan professionals' cultural values, social structures, or educational backgrounds. Researchers could triangulate data and capture both quantifiable outcomes and the complex lived experiences of participants by using mixed-methods study designs that combine phenomenological interviews with quantitative measurements of stress, resilience, and job satisfaction.

Future research should also focus on gender and family issues. Different experiences within the Afghan refugee population may be revealed by examining the ways in which caregiving obligations, gender roles, and family expectations affect mental health and professional adaptability. Women professionals, for example, may face particular obstacles to career progression or experience increased stress due to the juggling of work and home responsibilities. Institutional research on the success of foreign credential recognition schemes and diversity initiatives can also provide insight into systemic obstacles to employment, underemployment, and professional deskilling. More fair workforce practices and policy changes can be influenced by an understanding of these dynamics.

The professional and psychological results of Afghan refugee professionals could be improved by a number of practice and policy initiatives. In order to establish trust, encourage participation, and promote mental health, social workers and counselors should use culturally sensitive methods. Culturally responsive mental health treatments are essential (Heim et al., 2021; Hosseini et al., 2024). Removal can be avoided and refugees can make valuable contributions to their areas by expediting and streamlining the assessment of foreign degrees and professional qualifications.

In order to facilitate the move into the employment, community-based integration programs such as job-orientation workshops, transportation assistance, and mentoring programs can offer refugees professional advice, social networks, and useful skills. Likewise, cultural competency and anti-bias education-focused employer training programs can facilitate the successful integration of refugee professionals, lessen stereotyping, and make workplaces more inclusive (Groen et al., 2018).

Additionally, advocacy and leadership are essential. Promoting policy advocacy by Afghan professional associations can impact local, state, and federal laws and advance workforce participation. Employers, community institutions, and refugee-serving organizations can collaborate to create focused professional development courses, credential-conversion programs, and bridging programs. Through these partnerships, refugee professionals are able to close skill gaps, get recognized qualifications, and expand work prospects in their fields of expertise. Future research and policy can improve Afghan refugee professionals' professional integration and general well-being by integrating these research avenues with real-world initiatives, fostering a more

### **Positive Social Change Implications**

Through applied research that benefits both individuals and society as a whole, Walden University places a strong emphasis on promoting constructive social change. According to Walden University's social change purpose, these findings emphasize the necessity of deliberate tactics that enhance inclusion, equity, and access for displaced professionals. Individual well-being is enhanced and more inclusive and equitable

community structures are promoted when Afghan refugee professionals are assisted in reestablishing their jobs. The key areas where focused social change initiatives can result in long-term systemic development are described in this section. The results of this investigation have ramifications on several levels:

### **Empowerment on an Individual and Psychological Level**

Participants showed how humans can adjust, grow, and rediscover meaning despite being uprooted. Psychological services that are culturally sensitive and focus on identity restoration and resilience can encourage empowerment. Human motivation entails pursuing mastery and meaning, as noted by Freud (1920), as demonstrated by participants' desire to reestablish their jobs and sense of value. Empowering individuals also makes communities healthier. Refugees who are given meaningful avenues to professional reintegration and healing have lower rates of social isolation, anxiety, and depression, all of which have been connected to community-level instability in refugee groups. As a result, improving psychological well-being transforms into a preventative social transformation that lessens the long-term burden on social services, healthcare, and community support networks.

### **Professional and Academic Establishments**

Academic institutions, professional licensing bodies, and universities should create mentorship programs and transparent, unambiguous processes for recognizing overseas credentials. Incorporating refugee professionals into academic and professional environments increases workforce diversity, encourages intercultural cooperation, and stimulates creativity by exchanging global viewpoints. Such inclusion promotes

organizational development and societal improvement in addition to empowering refugees. Academic and professional organizations can set an example of social responsibility and equity-driven practices that can impact broader state and federal legislation by implementing inclusive credentialing paths. These institutional changes not only help Afghan refugee workers, but they also establish standards for the integration of foreign-trained workers into the American labor market. Diversity within professional sectors is increased and the talent pipeline as a whole is strengthened by such systemic inclusion.

### **Change at the Policy and Community Level**

Resettlement organizations and policymakers can create comprehensive programs that concurrently target psychosocial integration, employment, and language. According to COR Theory, these programs would create "resource caravans" that maintain stability over generations. Another aspect of community-level reform is giving local organizations, like nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and Afghan community groups, the authority to actively promote the success of refugees. When given the necessary resources and involved in the creation of policies, these organizations can offer lobbying, translation assistance, and mentorship that is culturally appropriate. In addition to creating more inclusive workplaces and neighborhoods, this increases community capacity.

### **The Economic Impact and Stability of Society via Professional Reintegration**

There are clear economic and social advantages for the US in helping refugee professionals pursue their professions. A substantial loss of human capital occurs when highly qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers, teachers, and IT specialists—

cannot practice because of credentialing requirements, budgetary constraints, or a lack of support. These individuals can reenter their industries and help address manpower shortages in vital sectors by receiving assistance through culturally sensitive resettlement services, credential-bridging programs, and specialized training. Through more tax contributions, less reliance on government aid, and an increase in the number of skilled professionals, this shift boosts the national economy. When highly skilled workers like engineers, doctors, or educators cannot work in their fields because of systemic barriers and are forced to take lower-skilled or gig-economy jobs, the country loses valuable expertise. These workers could make a much greater contribution to the American workforce and society with even a small amount of assistance. There are also mental health benefits to facilitating professional reintegration; refugees who are able to use their skills in a meaningful way report lower levels of anxiety, depression, and identity loss factors linked to social instability and, in certain situations, increased susceptibility to exploitation or crime. Therefore, offering sufficient support enhances social cohesiveness, community safety, and long-term national success in addition to promoting individual well-being. Collectively, these results show that facilitating the integration of Afghan refugee professionals leads to beneficial social change on many levels, from stronger communities and a more resilient national workforce to individual empowerment and family stability. Therefore, establishing fair channels for their professional reintegration is not only advantageous but also necessary to create a society that is more diverse, prosperous, and just.

## Conclusion

A complex interplay between resource loss, cultural adjustment, structural barriers, and personal resilience was revealed by this phenomenological study that examined the lived experiences of ten Afghan refugee professionals as they managed psychological, social, and professional integration in the United States. The results, which were interpreted using the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory and the Stress Appraisal and Coping Model, demonstrated that forced relocation affects not only financial stability but also identity, meaning, and psychological health. Nevertheless, participants showed a remarkable amount of resolve to resume their careers in spite of discrimination, lack of institutional support, unacknowledged credentials, and language barriers. According to their experiences, integration is a dynamic, long-term process that is impacted by coping mechanisms, external pressures, and access to worthwhile opportunities. While those who faced ongoing systemic barriers experienced prolonged distress and decreased self-efficacy, those who benefited from mentoring, culturally sensitive services, or credential-bridging pathways demonstrated greater optimism and professional recovery. Additionally, this study reaffirms that, if their reintegration is not supported, preventable economic and social losses result. Afghan refugee professionals are an important source of untapped human capital whose abilities can assist address the U.S. workforce shortages and improve society. This study highlights the critical need for equitable credentialing procedures, accessible mental health care, inclusive legislation, and community-based initiatives that acknowledge refugees as valuable contributors by giving them a voice. Supporting their professional reintegration has significant

ramifications for social cohesion, economic productivity, and constructive social change.

It is also a moral obligation and a calculated investment in the welfare of the country.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### **Interview Questions**

We appreciate you taking the time to take part in this study. I would like to remind everyone before we start that this interview is being recorded only for transcription. Only research will be conducted using your answers, and your personal information will be kept private. Do not hesitate to ask mean inquiries you might have or to let me know if you are uncomfortable at any time.

I will give a quick introduction and the goal of the study at the start of each interview. The permission form's ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and your ability to withdraw at any moment, will then be reviewed with you. The interview questions, which center on your experiences working as an Afghan refugee in the United States, will then be discussed. Before we start, allow yourself to ask any questions you may have.

### **Interview Questions**

- Could you explain your experience relocating to the United States and seeking work?
- How difficult has it been for you to adapt to American professional settings and cultural norms?
- In what ways do you manage stress or loneliness associated with your relocation?

- How did you learn that there were jobs available in the United States? Did your job hunt benefit from any particular networks or resources?
- What were the most significant obstacles, either personal or professional, that you encountered when trying to find work after moving to the United States?
- Have you encountered instances in the American job market where your professional abilities were either exaggerated or underestimated? What were your thoughts about that?
- What kinds of assistance—professional, social, or emotional—did you find most useful in acclimating to life in the United States?
- In what ways has your professional communication style been modified to suit the American workplace?
- How do you think your Afghan identity has affected your experiences or relationships at work?
- Throughout your career in the United States, have you experienced any bigotry or discrimination? If yes, how did you handle or deal with it?

## Appendix B: Email Invitation Template

### **Subject line:Email Invitation Template**

An invitation to participate in a research project about the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the US.

### **Email message:**

A recent study on the experiences of Afghan refugee professionals in the US may help politicians, community organizations, and caregivers better understand and assist Afghan refugees. You are welcome to participate in this study by sharing your experiences adjusting to life in the United States and adjusting to life in the United States after being resettled.

### **About the study:**

One 45–60 minute audio-recorded interview by Zoom.

Although there won't be any payment, you will get a note of appreciation for your time.

In order to preserve your privacy, the published study will not disclose any names or personally identifiable information.

### **Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

You currently reside in the United States as a refugee from Afghanistan.

You must be at least 18 years old.

You've been in the United States for a minimum of five to seven years, and

A professional or specialized field, like healthcare, education, engineering, or another that calls for education, training, certification, or a degree, is what you are working in or have worked in.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Khatera Bahrami, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place between (June and November 2025).

Please email **khatera.bahrami@waldenu.edu** to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

## Appendix C: Interview Log

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Participant	Setting	Date	Duration
Participant 1	Zoom	8/4/2025	23 minutes
Participant 2	Zoom	8/19/2025	23 minutes
Participant 3	Zoom	8/19/2025	18 minutes
Participant 4	Zoom	8/19/2025	26 minutes
Participant 5	Zoom	9/11/2025	16 minutes
Participant 6	Zoom	9/19/2025	16 minutes
Participant 7	Zoom	9/26/2025	23 minutes
Participant 8	Zoom	9/27/2025	13 minutes
Participant 9	Zoom	9/29/2025	17 minutes
Participant 10	Zoom	10/4/2025	16 minutes

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## Appendix D: Initial Codes Example

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<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Example Quotes</b>
Difficulty finding job in the field	7	“I work you know just in a small business in a position, and after a while I got higher position.”
	8	“What was your wish? You cannot approach those and thing that you have in your mind. So it's really challengeable for me as a professional person.”
	5	“When I came first, I didn't know anybody, and it was really hard for me to navigate the jobs around.”

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## Appendix E: Developing Themes Example

Theme	Subtheme	Example code	Example of quotes
Rebuilding professional identity and adapting to the American workforce	“Emotional and Confidence Struggles in the Workplace.	Lack of capability/confidence felt	<p>“I think at my first job, they underestimated me a lot of the times, but because they didn't think I was capable of doing certain things.” (P4)</p> <p>“In America, there is still some doubt or suggestion in some companies about the value of foreign experiences.” (P1)</p>

## Appendix F: Themes, Subthemes, and Quotes From Participants

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
<b>Theme 1: Early relocation challenges and obstacles to social and professional integration</b>	Subtheme 1: Communication and resources barriers during early resettlement	“The other issue was about the language barrier to finding the job. This is a big issue.” (P8)
	Subtheme 2: Cultural misunderstanding and systemic inequality	“There are certain things that we interpret differently than Americans. On those issues, I learned that difficult way, because when I said something, for example, thumbs up. It’s a good thing in America. Thumbs up in my country is not a good thing. So, I had to learn all those things. By making mistake and seeing other people are laughing.” (p1)
	Subtheme 3: Positive beginning Followed by adjustment challenges	“We didn't see any problems at that time, but over time, you will understand the problems yourself, which are resettlement problems. We started life from scratch” (P1)
	Subtheme 4: Challenges with recognition of foreign education and experiences	“They value the internal experience. They don't value your background, your experience.” (P8)
	Subtheme 5: Navigating early relocation and employment challenges without guidance	“I had to start from somewhere to you know, pay my bills and all that stuff. At the beginning, it was hard because I was never used to this kind of

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
		work that I started at the beginning. But by passing of the time, I got used to it, and then navigate around, Knowing other people” (P5)
	Subtheme 6: Overcoming early hardship community and agency support	“I participate in many job fairs events, but they were useless for us. Because what they're looking for we are not suitable for that. what we are looking for, they don't accept us, or they don't offer us. I think for Afghans, they should establish a different structure and unfortunately, in most of the organization. They should hire, like, a qualified Afghans or someone from the related country. At least they know about the system, about the culture, and about the consequences.” (P8)
<b>Theme 2: Getting around American workplace customs and cultural expectations</b>	Subtheme 1: Workplace norms and cultural differences	“You asked a very important question. Adapting to the professional environment and work culture in America is one of the main challenges for refugees for example, when I started working, my manager expected me to be fast and clear. I thought that if I made a mistake, I would have to admit it.” (P1)
	Subtheme 2: Support from prior experience and	“It's different for us, as a professional who came to

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
<b>Theme 3: Stress reduction and psychological adjustment during resettlement</b>	Afghan community networks	this country. It's easy to be adjusted, because you already know about the systems, and We work back home with people from here, and so we already know about the cultures, about the systems.” (P8)
	Subtheme 1: Coping and distraction strategies	“Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience, even for those who are successful professionally and personally. First, it's very difficult. We understand that relocation is a psychological shock even at the best of times. But we set goals for ourselves, we worked out, we followed TV shows, we made great friends, we were always in touch with our families, we were never idle, and even on our off days always going to the market, cooking, and cleaning the house with friends to pass the time. Because if we are home alone for a day, we think the world has come to an end. We felt very lonely. Our stress increased a lot and because of that, we are always busy with work.” (P1)
	Subtheme 2: Support systems and coping strategies during	“It's kind of easier in here. You don't have those barriers that you have back home. Because the lack of

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
	resettlement	job back home is kind of different. But, yeah, you have, like, the best thing here, you have lots of opportunity. (P3)"
	Subtheme 3: Emotional and psychological stress	“Loneliness and stress are a real part of the relocation experience, even for those who are successful professionally and personally.” (P1)
	Subtheme 4: Professional guidance and training	“The Case worker took English and specialized classes in a field for us. While I worked in field, then we found the rest of the work ourselves.” (P1)
	Subtheme 5: Transportation challenges during early professional adjustment	“In here or western culture, the most difficult thing for me at the beginning was transportation because as you know now, as I know now, without a car Living is very difficult.” (P4)
<b>Theme 4: Modifying job search techniques and getting employment information</b>	Subtheme 1: Job search networks and online platforms	“When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application. And when we didn't know, we later followed various websites such as Indeed, Glassdoor, LinkedIn, department emails that usually publish job information or job search information, and

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
<b>Theme 5: Employment integration obstacles, both personal and structural</b>		sometimes we found a job from friends who had worked before and with their advice.” (P1)
	Subtheme 2: Difficulty in not having work experience	“Without any prior job experiences. It’s hard to get a job.” (P4)
	Subtheme 1: Inadequate financial help during	“The state I was living was not that great in providing support for refugees either. I was getting only small financial support for a month. For a few months. I didn't want to even take that. I wanted them to find me a job, help me find a job.” (P4)
	Subtheme 2: Economic and housing hardship	“I try to study some... professional, new professional. I paid, you know, for a course in a professional field in a university for many months. And the fees were paid on my own. I had some, you know, saving. After getting a degree from university. I applied, probably. For dozens of companies.” (P7)
Subtheme 3: Work culture and communication barriers	“Especially me being the responsible person, I must be home at a certain time so we could all eat together. It impacts my work, because they want me to stay longer and help. But I can't because I must come home and help with	

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
		the family and then for professional, I think again, just not really being able to connect to a lot of the people at work there because we all grew up so differently. (P9)
	Subtheme 4: Cultural adjustment and workplace comfort	When I started a job like with my coworkers. I would say I felt comfortable. I felt okay with the coworkers. There were not too many difficulties” (P10)
	Subtheme 5: Professional guidance needs in resettlement	“And in a foreign country, you start from scratch; you definitely need someone to guide you.” (P1)
	Subtheme 6 Confidence and self-efficacy challenges	“If you want to do a good job, or get a good payment, you must do something like you have to do some certifications, you have to go through some training. These are the big things. I mean, the source of that. Provide you with money for the training. These are the big things, like, kind of the barriers for me and the United States. (P3)
	Subtheme 7: Misjudgment of skills and qualifications exaggerated	“The third thing is, like, sometimes they call you overqualified, but when you don't ask my credential, why you call me overqualified. Because you already do not recognize my... credential, so when

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
		you don't recognize it, they over qualification term is like not true". (P8)
	Subtheme 8: Under-recognition of skills and experiences	<p>“At first, they thought I couldn't do the work I started.</p> <p>When I was out of work for a few weeks, they realized that I could work and sent me a thank you note.” (P1)</p>
<b>Theme 6: Rebuilding professional identity and adapting to the American workforce</b>	Subtheme 1: Economic instability and perceived undervaluation	<p>“You have to continue your education, you have to like start going to the university, like, it's hard, because they said, you have to like have your degree from USA and it's very hard for a Professional working in fast food places, or I know job is job, but it is hard.” (P2)</p>
	Subtheme 2: Career transition and adjustment	<p>“I realized that my income was not enough. And my partner at that time had to quit the specific classes to work so we could pay our bills and take care of our kids.” (P6)</p>
	Subtheme 1 Economic Instability and perceived Undervaluation	<p>“You have to continue your education, you have to like start going to the</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
		<p>university, like, it's hard, because they said, you have to like have your degree from USA and it's very hard for a Professional working in fast food places, or I know job is job, but it is hard.” (P2)</p>
		<p>Subtheme 2 Career Transition and Adjustment  “I realized that my income was not enough. And my partner at that time had to quit the specific classes to work so we could pay our bills and take care of our kids.” (P6)</p>
		<p>Subtheme 3 Emotional and confidence struggles in the workplace  “During those years, either there were not much emotional help or assistance, or maybe I didn't know how to reach them.” (P6)</p>
	<p>Subtheme 4: Barriers to professional integration and recognition</p>	<p>“You know, the qualification that you had in Afghanistan, or whatever work you have been doing there. But those skills and qualifications were not recognized here in U.S.” (P5)</p>
<p><b>Theme 7: The Function of support systems in social and emotional</b></p>	<p>Subtheme 1: Social and cultural connection support</p>	<p>“Relocation is not just a physical displacement. It is profound cultural,</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
adjustment		emotional, and social change. Therefore, no person, no matter how strong, can truly progress without real support. For example, the only thing that saved us during our years of relocation was good people who supported us not only with work and some things so that we wouldn't feel lonely. Support is not just a face, it is an experience, and we had this experience.” (P1)
	Subtheme 2: Lack of support with medical and financial assistance	“I didn't have any help with medical expenses, and I didn't approve for medical expenses, and my husband had a good salary, but this is not enough for my kids. He had to support some of his family in his country back home, and I had a part-time job, I was sick, I couldn't work full-time. Because I have kids and I was expecting. There were many challenges. We needed support.” (P2)
	Subtheme 3: Job hunting by contacting stores and shops	“When we first arrived, we started by asking the people near our house, shop by shop, if they had any work, and in the end, we filled application.” (P1)
	Subtheme 4: Social services and financial assistance	“Actually, the support that I got was Like, mostly from Friends, government

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
		<p>also, like, social services. They provided me, like, some money for the courses and stuff and, I like the environment of the United States. They are very supportive. The people that I saw around, Kind of compared to other countries that I heard from my friends they are very, supportive, and they support you on everything. Like, if you go a new job.” (P3)</p>
	<p>Subtheme 5: Institutional and language support</p>	<p>“The community colleges and these things should, like, helped a lot too, like, if you go there as a refugee, they will provide you some program with the language and everything. I found it very useful for my family, for my partner and everything. I would say that that's a big thing, and big move for the refugees.” (P3)</p>
<p><b>Theme 8: Adapting communication in the workplace and preserving cultural identity</b></p>	<p>Subtheme 1: Cultural and professional transition</p>	<p>“In this culture that may be very much welcome and acceptable here and, we have to learn to allow our family members to adapt this culture and be open-minded to be acceptable in this society”. (P6)</p> <p>“First of all, every job I started, and we've worked in many places so far, the accents are very different.</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
	Subtheme 2: Workplace integration and social adjustment	<p>For a week or two, I didn't understand what people were asking me, or they didn't understand when I was talking to them. Over time, I got used to it. Talking with them in their accent, their way of asking questions, and then they became normal to me.” (P1)</p>
	Subtheme 3: Cultural identity and media influence	<p>“Due to media propaganda and the lack of knowledge and information. Afghanistan always shows up as a country of conflict, as a country of war, and the people think that they are not like modern people there is no education, but it's not true. We have lots of qualified and very educated people and if we compare that with the neighborhood countries those people from those countries, they find themselves in this country. But Afghans have two problems. At first, their community, and second, the systems they don't recognize them.” (P8)</p>
	Subtheme 4: Communication barriers and adaptation strategies	<p>“Specifically, communication style, I think it's very different now, because. Your kind of must be very cold. The</p>

Theme	Subtheme	Example Quote
<b>Theme 9: Handling social perceptions, stereotypes, and Afghan identity at work</b>	Subtheme 1: Normalization and acceptance of discrimination	way that you speak, you can't really be friends with your coworkers, you must have a balance between being friends, and then also just maintaining a work relationship. I think here it's you have you to just, I wasn't very aware of that, so when I got this job now, I must like be very careful of how you word things, and so I think that's one of the ways that I've modified my communication style.” (P9)
	Subtheme 2: In integration, self-advocacy and positive engagement are important.	“The experience of discrimination or injustice of many refugees, especially Afghans, is real but hidden, not obvious, but I feel and think that this discrimination is a natural thing and in every country.” (P1)
	Subtheme 3: Stereotyping and identity concealment	“I'm an Afghan I don't feel bad I feel proud. I explain myself to them, and I did not see any reactions, bad reactions, from them in society. So, I did not face that.” (P10)
<b>Theme 10:</b>	Subtheme 1: Experiences	“It is so extreme, especially in the late years. Sometimes I'm even hesitant to mention where I am or what religion I follow.” (P6)
		“Applying for a job there

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<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Example Quote</b>
<b>Discrimination at work and psychological coping mechanisms</b>	of discrimination	you're really qualified for that job, but they don't really consider because I feel like that, but I don't believe that that's the case." (P5)
	Subtheme 2: Coping and resolution strategies	"I deal with it by staying professional, focusing on my work, and improving myself through my performance., and, I try my best."(P2)

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