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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTEGRATION INTO MAINSTREAM SOCIETY AND THE USE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE: A STUDY FIRST GENERATION SOMALI REFUGEE IN A MIDWESTERN CITY

Tohoro F. Akakpo, PhD, MSW, MPA

Social Work Professional Programs, University of Wisconsin, Green Bay, WI

James R. Brown, PhD, MSW

School of Social Work, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Isaac Karikari, PhD, MSW

Department of Social Work, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND

Gifty Dede Ashirifi

School of Social Work, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN.

Abstract

First generation Somali refugees in the United States could experience both language and cultural barriers along with conflicting identity could hinder economic independence. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the correlation between cultural orientation of first-generation Somali refugees and the utilization of public assistance. Using purposive sampling method, data were collected from individuals who self-identified as first-generation Somali refugees (N=166). A quantitative data analysis method using SmartPLS3.0 to predict the need of public assistance on level on integration into host culture. The Somali identity (63.0 %) and American identity (57.0%) were explained by the full model. The study summary revealed that the percentage first generation Somali refugees who integrated into mainstream society were lower than those who did not in seeking public assistance. We suggested facilitation of full integration of the first-generation Somali refugees could reduce dependence on public assistance.

Keywords: Integration, First Generation Somali Refugees, Public Assistance.

INTRODUCTION

Global instability has given rise to individuals who are displaced within their countries and across national borders (Crisp, 2005). The United States (U.S), akin to other politically and economically stable countries, receives a number of refugees from many parts of the world fleeing from persecution due to their political opinions or religious beliefs (Ali, 2009; Nash, Wong & Trlin, 2006; Valentine, Sporton & Nielsen, 2009). From 2005 to 2014, countries that offered refugees permanent resettlement and integration included the U.S. (73,000), Canada (12,000), Australia (11,600), Sweden (2,000), Norway (1,300), and Finland (1,100) (European Stability Initiative, 2015). This amounts to the U.S. accepting 44,700 more refugees than the remaining top five countries combined.

The number of refugees admitted into the United States is governed by the "refugee

ceiling” set by the President together with the U. S. Congress at the start of each fiscal year (FY) (Bruno, 2017). Bruno’s report in Congressional Research Service indicates that the FY 2018 U.S. e refugee ceiling is 45,000 with the following regional allocations: Africa (19,000), East Asia (5,000), Europe and Central Asia (2,000), Latin America/Caribbean (1,500), and Near East/South Asia (17,500). Of Africa’s total allocation of 19,000 refugees, a great share of those admissions came from the countries of Congo (9, 377) and Somalia (6,130) (Cepla, 2018). Martin (2018) reported the refugee ceiling had been slashed from the 45,000 for FY 2018 to 30,000 for FY 2019.

In a study conducted by Abdi in 2010, the researcher maintained that refugees from Somalia constituted the largest African refugee population in the United States. Following the collapse of the Somali State in the 1980s, Abdi (2010) reported that almost 100,000 Somalis had been granted refugee status in the United States. Like most refugees arriving in the United States with little or no resources, Somali refugees depend on government assistance to facilitate their resettlement and integration into mainstream American society. The Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) programs are federally funded short-term programs administered by states to newly arriving refugees not eligible for mainstream public assistance programs due to their lack of legal status as U.S. citizens or permanent residents (Bruno, 2017). Research on Somali refugee resettlement in the United States indicates they face economic hardships such as obtaining a paying job and insecurities such as feeling like outsiders because of language and cultural barriers (Abdi, 2010; Shandy & Fennelly, 2006). These language and cultural barriers along with conflicting identity and biases could hinder economic independence of Somali refugees within their host community. This article seeks to understand these challenges facing first generation Somali refugees who have immigrated to a mid-sized U.S. city.

Despite the intersectionality of TANF and RCA, the Somali refugees find themselves caught between self-sufficiency and seeking government assistance in an era when public assistance budgets are shrinking (Ali, 2009). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families has changed the social welfare landscape (Ozawa & Yoon, 2005). As Ozawa and Yoon (2005) state, the enactment of this law was the biggest shift of government assistance to the poor since the New Deal. These two researchers argued that the historic departure from the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) as part of the Family Support Act of 1988 is reflected in TANF’s “work first” orientation and that receiving cash assistance engenders hardship on the people the program was designed to assist (Ozawa & Yoon, 2005, p. 239). Thus, TANF’s policies could push many refugees with little or no proficiency in English to enter the workforce immediately upon arrival. At best, such refugees will be stuck in jobs with little chance of advancement which further exacerbates their need for public aid. The trauma they suffered fleeing from a war-torn zone, bouncing from country to country, and then upon admission to the U.S having to move from state to state, as well as trying to maintain their own identity and understand the values of their new host society, could easily leave this population in a state of chronic abject poverty (Phillimore, 2011).

Conceptualization of Social Identity

This study is predicated on social identity theory which was proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). The theory explains inter-group relations within three cognitive processes: a) “people are motivated to maintain a positive self-concept, b) self-concept derives largely from group identification, and c) people establish positive social identities by favorably comparing their in-group against an out-group” (Padilla, & Perez, 2003, p.43). Consequently, individual biases translate into one group dominating another group. This approach reinforces the idea that individuals’ social understandings are socially constructed depending on their group or collective frames of reference. According to social identity theory, refugees are likely to face prejudice and discrimination while trying to adapt to their new environment.

Social identity theory has been criticized as meaningless and arbitrary (Hornsey, 2008). However, the authors of this research believe that the theory can be useful to study, predict, and explain mainstream integration experiences and the behaviors observed of intergroup processes. The underpinnings of Tajfel and Turner's work are based on the reflexive thoughts of human interactions between members of their self-identified social group and other groups with whom they have no history or shared social norms. Stets and Burke (2000) state that social identity theory is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs in a social category or group. These authors add that a social group is comprised of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Social identification cannot hold when people lose their social identity as a result of forced migration (Colic-Peisker & Walker, 2003).

Despite Somalia being one of the top ten countries of origin of the refugee population in the United States (Prah, 2012), they are still a small minority with a different culture, value system and language which lead them to have worldviews that are quite different from the mainstream society in the United States. These differences may cause them to face extended challenges in adapting to the American culture. Their inability to live or observe the lifestyle of their homeland in their host community could also be an obstacle to integration and self-reliance. (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Refugee as a Legal Identity

The legal identity - "refugee" - is an administrative status that enables those identified as refugees to receive public assistance and other social support. Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) assert that this type of administrative identity, a result of force migration, is undesirable and engenders difficulties in acculturation and identity reconstruction. Identity is associated with one's nationality, values and customs. In regard to this, Somali refugees learning a new culture and language as way of to integrate into their host society will impact their original identity which itself could consider identity reconstruction. Even though the legal identification as refugees serves the purpose of safety and eligibility for public assistance upon initial arrival, some researchers note that labeling individuals as refugees could be challenging as they try to adapt to their new but unfamiliar environment (Leudar, Sharrock, Haye, & Truckle, 2008; Warfa et al., 2012).

Refugee Resettlement Policy and Refugee Public Assistance

The Refugee Resettlement Assistance Act of 1980 and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR) clearly state that, unlike immigrants who enter the United States through family or employment ties, refugees are not required to demonstrate economic self-sufficiency. They receive public assistance through a Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program to help them transition to becoming socially and economically self-sufficient.

Unlike the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, which sometimes involves reliance on public assistance for the short or long term (up to 60 months) involving United States citizens, the RCA program provides public assistance to refugees for the first eight months of their arrival in the United States (Bruno, 2017). Refugees are eligible for federally funded cash, medical, and other social assistance programs only within this time. This may not be a sufficient amount of time for cultural adjustment and acquisition of necessary skills to successfully join the workforce (Gaffney, Farrel, Elkin, & Koralek, 2018). If a refugee is unable to maintain their livelihood after the expiration of the RCA program, and having incomes below the threshold of earning less than \$839 a month for a family of two, they become eligible for TANF or Supplemental Security Income (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.; Gaffney et al., 2018). The eligibility for refugees to transition from RCA to TANF is more than likely a contributing factor

to the number of public assistance recipients among refugee populations. For example, O'Brien and Raley's (2018) report from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) states that the annual expenditure for refugee resettlement is \$1.8 billion with \$867 million spent on welfare alone. The report also states that 92.5% of refugees use the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) with more than 50% continuing on Medicaid for more than a five-year-period. Additionally, approximately 54% of most refugees in their first five years of resettlement hold jobs that pay them below \$11 per hour (O'Brien & Raley, 2018). Between 2009 and 2011, some refugees living in the United States who were originally from Somalia and other parts of the world had incomes 50% below the federal poverty level (Capps & Fix, 2015). Prior to Capps and Fix's (2015) study on refugees' poverty level, Camarota (2011) conducted a self-reported study among the Somali refugee population that revealed a substantial need for public assistance. To mitigate public assistance, other researchers suggest, refugee populations should receive culturally appropriate and individualized employment services including language provision, support targeted to the professions in which the individuals have experience, and training in other occupations to acquire new skills and qualifications, and work placement gains (Gaffney et al., 2018). For example, Shutes (2011) strongly suggested that public funding of employment, education and training may have implications for reduced reliance on certain categories of government assistance such as SNAP.

While public assistance and services provided through the RCA program accurately target some of the immediate needs of refugees, they do not address other issues such as integration difficulties, traumatic stress, and employer discrimination (Cort, 2010). To reinforce this point, there is a high probability that many first-generation Somali refugees do not speak English. Hence, developing a strategy for learning the new language of their host society should be a top priority. It is also important to note that learning a new language without appropriate guidance could be a challenge to the newcomers (Cort, 2010). If acculturation is based on requiring helping refugees learn English, as policy experts and political pundits assume to be the case, then investing in programs that increase access to education should be a priority.

Somali Integration into Mainstream Society

The process of integration often is not smooth for Somali refugees in the United States due to cultural differences that include but are not limited to family structures, religious practices, and communication barriers (Ali, 2009). For example, Shandy and Fennelly (2006) found significant differences regarding integration in the perceptions of Somali versus Sudanese refugees living in the U.S. Christian Sudanese easily practice their religion in a predominantly Christian communities, Somali refugees living in the same environment could face challenges in practicing their religion due to lack of existing infrastructure (Shandy & Fennelly, 2006). In addition, Sudanese refugees received sponsorship from Christian Churches which give them more opportunities for integration in their local communities as compared to Islamic refugees from Somalia (Shandy & Fennelly, 2006). There is no doubt that even when from the same continent, the two groups of refugees (Christian and Muslim) have distinct cultural experiences in the U.S. The Sudanese Christian refugees easily integrated into mainstream society because their religious practice is the same as their host society (Segal & Mayadas, 2005; Shandy & Fennelly, 2006).

Current Study

Recognizing the challenges of integration into mainstream society that Somali refugees may face upon arrival in the United States, this current study explored the correlation between the integration into the mainstream society of first-generation Somali refugees who live in a mid-sized Midwestern city and the utilization of public assistance. Our



study explored the formative factors impacting Somali refugees' full integration into the host society. The majority of Somali refugees in this study arrived in the United States with limited financial resources, had little or no formal education, and in most cases, lacked fluency in English (Akresh, 2007, Kanya & White, 2011; Potocky-Tripodi, 2003). As a result of lack of financial resources, many of these refugees need to rely on public housing and public assistance longer than the government stipulated period of eight months (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, 2013).

Therefore, this study examined pathways of integration of a sample of first-generation Somali refugees who live in a mid-sized city in a Midwestern state. In so doing, we set out to test two hypotheses: (1) There is a correlation between adherence to Somali identity and receiving public assistance; and (2) The first-generation Somali refugees who integrate the mainstream will be less likely receive public assistance.

METHODS

The participants (N=166) in this study were first generation Somali refugee who lived in a Mid-western urban city and suburbs of a population of about 100,000. The sample was purposive which included only those self-identified as first-generation refugees. The researchers also used snowballing, non-probability sampling to recruit the participants (Yegidi, Weinbsch, & Meyers, 2012).

Administration of Measure

The survey and the consent form were written in both English and Somali enable those could not read English to participants in the research. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, the basic content of the questionnaire and the ability to egress from the study at any time were given to the participants. A Social Work graduate student from Somalia, whose name was included on the IRB, was trained by the Principal Investigator to collect data.

The survey instrument used for the study was the Somali Refugees Integration into American Mainstream Culture Scale (SRIMSCS) (Author, n.d). The survey instrument was composed of thirty questions using five-point Likert Scale from 1(Not at all) to 5 (almost always) to measure integration processes of first-generation Somali refugees, and six demographic questions. The instrument was modeled on the Cuellar, Harris, and Jaso's (1980) Acculturation rating scale for Mexican Americans-I. The SRIMSCS 30- item integration scale has three sub-scales focusing on (a) Somali Orientation and Separation Subscale (fifteen items, e.g., I identify myself as a Somali); (b). Integration Mainstream Society (nine items; I feel at ease with American people); and (c) Assimilation subscale (six items, I believe in mainstream values). This instrument was tested with an eight-week test-retest reliability with a sample of 30. The scales had acceptable inter-item reliability of Somali Orientation and Separation subscale $\alpha = .783$; Integration to mainstream subscale $\alpha = .776$; and Total Assimilation subscale, $\alpha = .709$

The first subscale: Somali Orientation and Separation, measures the level of Somali isolation from their host community. The second subscale: Integration into mainstream, measures the level of their comfort associating with the citizens of the community in which they live. The third subscale: Assimilation contains six items that measured acceptance American culture. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .885$) of SRIMSCS indicated an excellent internal consistency of the items in the scale. This instrument is cultural group specific. Unlike Cuellar's, et al (1980) scale that took intergeneration into account, this instrument measures only the first generation of the Somali population that was processed and admitted into the United States as refugees.

Data Analysis

The analyses were conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 software was used to generate descriptive statistics which provided a demographic profile of the Somali refugees (i.e., the study participants) living in this Midwestern mid-sized city. In addition to SPSS, structural equation modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0 was adopted in data analysis. While there are several SEM tools for analysis, the choice to use Partial Least Squares (PLS) was driven by the fact that PLS was developed to handle both formative and reflective indicators whereas other SEM techniques do not permit this (Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper, & Ringle, 2012; Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015; Willaby, Costa, Burns, MacCann, & Roberts, 2015). In this study, the focus was on formative measurement which is a composite of indicators in scale. Indicators such as “I like to eat to American food, I speak English at home” were constructs used to measure the level of integration as well as acceptance of the American culture and value while controlling variables such as age, gender, marital status, work and education in that data analysis method to control their possible effect on survey responses.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Of the 166 participants, women made over fifty percent of the sample. The ages of the participant were grouped, and on the average the 24 to 29-year-olds were the largest group of 24.4%. Approximately, this average difference between 30- to 35 and 36 to 41 was less 1%. The least in percentage was 54 and over year old made up of 6.1%. Forty seven percent obtained high school diploma, 34% some college, 13% has some for technical college/vocational training and only 3% has college degrees. A good number of 24 has no formal education and none of the participants have post bachelor level education. Most of the participants in sample were married (58.3%) single (34.6%) divorced (6.4%) and widowed (.6%). A large percentage of 64.6% received assistance from the government compared to 35.4 who did not at the time the data collection. Additionally, 78.4% of the participants worked versus 21.6% who indicated that they were not working, (see Table 1)
Table 1: Distribution of Somali Refugees by age, Educational Level, Gender, Marital, Employment and Government Assistance (N=166)



| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| By Age | | |
| 18 to 23 years | 25 | 15.2 |
| 24 to 29 years | 40 | 24.4 |
| 30 to 35 years | 30 | 18.3 |
| 36 to 41 years | 29 | 17.7 |
| 42 to 47 years | 16 | 9.8 |
| 48 to 53 years | 14 | 8.5 |
| 54 years and over | 10 | 6.1 |
| By level of Education | | |
| No education | 24 | 15.8 |
| High School | 78 | 51.3 |
| Some College | 34 | 22.4 |
| Technical/Vocational Training | 13 | 8.6 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 3 | 2.0 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 75 | 45.7 |
| Female | 89 | 54.3 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 91 | 58.3 |
| Single | 54 | 34.6 |
| Divorced | 10 | 6.4 |
| Widowed | 1 | .6 |
| Employment Status | | |
| Not Working | 35 | 21.6 |
| Working | 127 | 78.4 |
| Government Aid | | |
| Not receiving assistance | 56 | 35.4 |
| Receiving assistance | 102 | 64.6 |

In order to test for the hypothesized relationships between the adherence to Somali identity, integration and receiving public assistance, structural equation modelling was performed using SmartPLS 3 (Becker, Klein, Wetzels, 2012; Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). Figure 1 shows PLS analysis, including path coefficient estimates and variance explanations (R² values) of the structural model. On the one hand, Somali external (e.g., attend social function with Somali people) and internal (e.g., believe in Somali values) indicators led to formative constructs that predict Somali identity. On the other hand, constructs such as American external (e.g., attend social functions.) and internal (believe in in mainstream values) indicators predict American influence or full integration into mainstream society.

The coefficient of determination (R² 0.631) for Somali identity was explained by American external and internal indicators whereas American identity was moderately explained by Somali external and internal indicators (R² 0.570). American identity in this study refers to the extent to which the first-generation Somali refugees feel attached and committed to the United States and its history and traditions. Figure 1 shows all direct and moderating effects forming a specific hypothesis for receiving government aid and with a value of R² 0.275. Specifically, our expectation was that seeking government aid would arise from cultural identity and acculturation or integration into mainstream society. Empirically, formative constructs predict outcomes variables, and in line with that prediction, the results for the full model indicate that 63% of the variance in Somali identity accounted for reliance on public assistance. Whereas and 57% of the variance in American identity significantly accounted reliance on public assistance.

Structural Model Results for the Overall Somali Identity and Integration

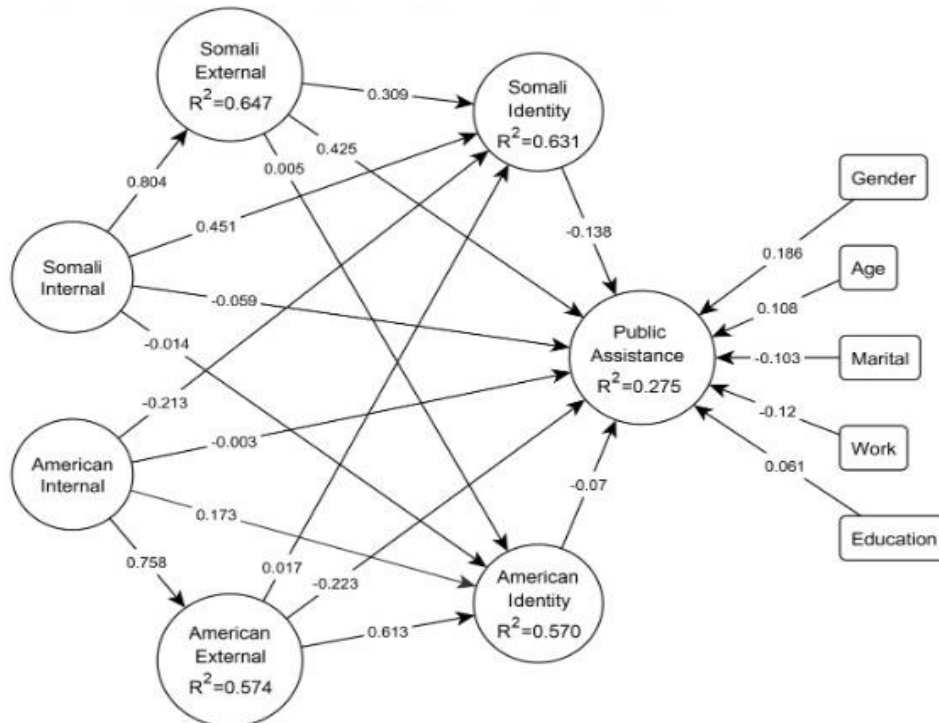


Table 1 summarizes the results of PLS analysis which include mean (M), standard deviation (STDVE), and t-statistic significant (p-value) for the full model. Following Hair et al. (2012) and Ringle et al. (2015), bootstrap re-sampling was employed to test the statistical significance of each path coefficient. Using formative constructs.

Table 2: Summary of the Structural Model: First Generation Somali Refugees in Midwestern Mid-Size City

| Path Coefficients | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics ((O/STDEV)) | P_ Values |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| American internal -> Amer. external | 0.845 | 0.849 | 0.020 | 41.241 | 0.001 |
| Somali internal -> Somali external | 0.830 | 0.838 | 0.029 | 28.326 | 0.001 |
| American internal -> Amer._identity | 0.514 | 0.527 | 0.137 | 3.746 | 0.001 |
| Somali internal -> Somali Identity | 0.589 | 0.603 | 0.159 | 3.698 | 0.001 |
| Gender -> Government aid | 0.186 | 0.174 | 0.069 | 2.698 | 0.007 |
| American internal -> Somali Identity | -0.253 | -0.237 | 0.105 | 2.402 | 0.017 |
| Somali identity -> Government aid | -0.249 | -0.251 | 0.107 | 2.319 | 0.021 |
| Somali external -> Government aid | 0.295 | 0.245 | 0.134 | 2.205 | 0.028 |
| Work -> Government aid | -0.120 | -0.104 | 0.067 | 1.781 | 0.076 |
| Marital status-> Government aid | -0.081 | -0.069 | 0.057 | 1.429 | 0.154 |
| American external -> Somali identity | 0.120 | 0.116 | 0.090 | 1.337 | 0.182 |
| American internal -> Govern. aid | -0.175 | -0.169 | 0.142 | 1.225 | 0.221 |
| Somali internal -> Govern. aid | 0.158 | 0.213 | 0.157 | 1.004 | 0.316 |
| American external -> Amer. identity | 0.125 | 0.117 | 0.147 | 0.848 | 0.397 |
| Education -> Government aid | 0.067 | 0.073 | 0.085 | 0.782 | 0.435 |
| Age -> Government aid | 0.096 | 0.129 | 0.123 | 0.777 | 0.438 |
| American external -> Govern. aid | -0.108 | -0.101 | 0.143 | 0.757 | 0.450 |
| Somali external -> Somali identity | 0.086 | 0.068 | 0.139 | 0.620 | 0.536 |
| Somali internal -> American identity | 0.044 | 0.029 | 0.121 | 0.363 | 0.716 |
| American Identity -> Government aid | -0.030 | -0.033 | 0.094 | 0.316 | 0.752 |
| Somali external -> American Identity | -0.016 | 0.001 | 0.124 | 0.128 | 0.898 |

This supported our hypothesis that there is a relationship between the first-generation Somalis with refugee status who continued to hold to their identity and receiving public assistance. For example, we found a significant relationship between the formative constructs, American external and internal, to be significant at $t = 41.241$, $p < .001$. The most important element to highlight in this study is that there is a significant relationship both between Somali identity construct and public assistance and this was accurately predicted ($t = 3.319$, $p = .001$) while controlling for other moderating factors such as age, gender, marital status, work, and education.

DISCUSSION

We presented a perspective on acculturation processes intended to yield contextual understanding of how first-generation Somali refugees' function in their host community. Our findings suggest that there are significant relationships between the Somali internal and external formative constructs ($t=28.32$, $p < .0001$). This supports other findings which suggest that integration depends on the immigrant's understanding of his/her identity in the host society (Phillimore, 2011; Shandy & Fennelly, 2006; Valentine, Sporton & Nielsen, 2009). Even though the Somalis with refugee status may not have had an opportunity to return to their native home, it is most likely that maintaining a strong association with their culture of origin, helped protect them from the potential negative effects of discrimination (Phillimore, 2011; Teixeira & Li, 2009). Our study revealed a very strong relationship of cultural identity, and integration based on the formative constructs. Among the relatively large sample drawn from a mid-sized city with a population of 104,779, where black or

African Americans comprised only 2.5%, the most prevalent race is white which represents 77.19% of the total population followed by a distant 12.83% Hispanic/Latino whereas Asian Americans represent 3.99%, as well as 3.33% of Native Americans with an infinitesimal 0.16% of individuals who describe themselves as bi-racial or more than one race (U.S Census Bureau population estimate, 2013). The number of first-generation Somalis with refugee status may constitute an infinitesimal number of those identified as black or African American in the host society. Hence, due to the population size being small, there is a possibility that the first-generation Somalis with refugee status probably may want to preserve their cultural values by consciously claiming a social identity. We were able to predict that some of the first-generation Somali refugees committed to Somali social identity whereas others assimilated taking on an American identity.

Although maintaining a strong association with Somali culture and values may be beneficial for Somalis living with refugee status in America, it may also present some disadvantages. For example, holding on to their culture includes holding on to their language and their way of living. Thus, maintaining their culture without taking advantage of new opportunities (i.e., education) may hinder their success in achieving full integration into American Society (Ali, 2009; Shandy & Fennelly, 2006). Therefore, some of the first-generation Somali refugees could have made a decision to undergo cultural changes because of their socio-economic and political situations in the host community.

Additionally, other researchers suggest that integration into mainstream society by immigrants, as well as their economic self-sufficiency, may be impacted by their geographical locations (Teixeira & Li, 2009; Yu, Ouellett & Warmington, 2007). The size of the city and its demographic composition (Shandy & Fennelly, 2006) could have had an impact on whether or not it was a smooth transition into mainstream society. This city and its satellite cities' major industries are education, health services and manufacturing (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, 2013) and there is a possibility that the Somali refugees who are not well-aculturated may not have access to gainful employment in these sectors. For example, the data we collected revealed that only 2% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree and a little over 48% have a high school education.

Phillimore (2011) contends that despite the wide discussion of the integration in social science literature, little attention was given to the ways in which social and public policy can facilitate or militate against it. According to Phillimore using Crips, the meaning of integration is highly contested and vigorously debated. Phillimore highlighted a school of thought that suggests that the term integration was being used to characterize tolerant and inclusive approaches through which ethnic minorities become assimilated. This researcher further discussed positive and negative factors that can impact the process of integration. The positive factors Phillimore discussed included access to education, training, housing, employment and social capital that can help refugees integrate. On the other hand, negative experiences such as lack of effective integration policy, negative public attitudes to refugees, racial incidents, fear and insecurity and experiences of bullying or racial abuse could threaten the process of integration.

This result provided some evidence that there was a statistically significant relationship between gender and integration pertaining to seeking public assistance. Though open to debate and further exploration, which is beyond the scope of this study, the higher rate of unemployment among women could be attributed to Somali women's clothing styles which are not typical standard business attire in the U.S. The women who wear headscarves (hijab) may be discriminated against because of their dress code which could lead to unemployment and result in a need to seek government assistance.

Policy Implications

This study may have serious implications for individuals who work with refugee



populations—particularly Somalis. Policymakers should introduce policies that empower the refugees through educational training and classes to improve their levels of English proficiency and acquire technical skills that may enhance their decision making and choices with regard to job selection. This capacity building initiative will benefit both the refugees and the host societies (Kumssa & Jones, 2014). Equipping the refugees with skills that will enable them to earn a living wage will likely reduce welfare rolls and improve the economy. Evidently, the adaptation of refugees presents special challenges related to settling in a new society. But as Texeira and Li (2009) suggest, policymakers could enact policies and create programs to alleviate the hardships and improve opportunities for self-sufficiency for Somali individuals living with refugee status in the U.S. A well-thought-out refugee policy that is humane is better than the intolerable and threats aimed at not only the refugees and asylum seekers but all immigrants in the U.S. We cannot emphasize enough as other researchers suggested that an efficient integration policy accompanied with integration services can help improve outcomes associated with refugee settlement (Phillimore, 2010; Texeira & Li, 2009).

Social Work Practice Implications

There are several social work models narrative approach and task-centered practice that this research could suggest as good fit for program design and interventions. However, we suggest that the findings would be a proper fit for Life Model (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009). It seems first generation Somalis who have refugee status could benefit from the application of interventions of the Life Model. Piedra and Engstrom (2009) used this model to inform their approach of understanding immigrants and their children. The Life Model practice is grounded in ecological theory to maximize the fit between individuals, families, and groups and their environment. Three new concepts that Gitterman and German (2008) using Piedra and Engstrom introduced as a reflection of the social work profession's sensitivity to diversity were: "(1) the recognition of factors that influence vulnerability and oppression; (2) the presence of healthy and unhealthy habitat and niche; and (3) the consideration of variation in the life course" (p. 271). We recognize the concerns identified that the Life Model did not address: the myriad of challenges facing the immigrants, especially the conflict between themselves and their children. However, based on Gitterman and Germain's findings, the application of the new concepts could serve as a starting point for the target population in this study who are learning to understand their host society and its values. This model could be helpful for first generation Somali refugees who may face socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political challenges in the United States. Social workers are likely to have refugees as clients seeking assistance in services. Hence, social workers must be in position to understand and assess the complex levels of acculturation of their refugee clients.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be considered in the development of future research. From the research design perspective, it would have been interesting to include moderating variables that could further inform the underlying factors that explain the dual identities of this small enclave of first-generation Somali refugees. For example, the variables of gender roles and values were not included in the constructs. The operationalization of the research variables using closed-ended questions limited our ability to explore gender roles, especially, the differences of cultural identity and values for males and females which were not included in the instrumentation. Incorporating a qualitative approach such as ethnographic data collection in future research involving the target population would yield a better understanding of gender differences. Also, the cross-sectional study did not allow the combination of both formative and reflective.

The use of the snowball sampling approach that is non-randomized may have



caused selection biases. This is further exacerbated by the limited sample size (N=166). In addition, the use of bootstrapping in SmartPLS 3.0 path analyses may have inflated the parameter estimation which could cause the risk of making a Type I error. This, coupled with the scope of the geographical area, constitutes a limitation as compared to bigger cities which are the most common gateways for immigrants and resettlement of refugees. Future research should focus on filling the gaps of representative sampling and including a qualitative component to provide rich information on individual experience through open-ended questions. This reinforces our observation that some causal variables such as length of time in the U.S. that were not considered could account for the observed relationships our model predicted.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study made suggestion of the training programs such as educational training that could improve outcomes in refugee resettlement practice. It highlights several barriers such as a lack of education as being some of the factors that lead refugees to seek public assistance. The same factors may also impact a Somali refugee's smooth transition into his or her host society. Therefore, to facilitate a smooth integration into mainstream society, social workers and other social services providers could adapt The Life Model practice philosophy of "living among the poor and sharing their struggles and joys" (Gitterman & Germain, 2008, p.447). The practice of working with the Somali refugees, recognizing their needs, and full understanding of their difficulties form the basis of evidence-based practice in social work.

Possible ameliorative efforts include creating programs of education and skills trainings that will help newcomers acquire relevant skills to earn a living wage. This in turn will be beneficial to the local economy and help produce a feeling of being part of the community.

From a policy perspective, it important to enact policies that are structured with a clear vision and supported by the necessary infrastructure in place for implementation. Thus, policies that do not demonstrate the commitment to provide culturally appropriate services and programs could lead to a structural failure at society level for full integration of the study population. Therefore, this study presents a preliminary step for more exploration of possible ways for Somali refugees to integrate and become more self-reliant within their host society.

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