

# **Unaccompanied Somali- and Syrian refugee women's experience of integration.**

A resource-based approach to integration of refugees.

Elena Marie Wetlesen Davanger



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## Abstract

Unaccompanied female refugees who resettle in Norway, must face the process of integration without support from nearby family members. This study explored the integration experiences of female Somali- and Syrian refugees who arrived alone, and how these experiences affected their well-being. This entailed exploring through a Salutogenic framework, the challenges associated with integration, and the resistance resources they used to cope with them.

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design, in order to explore six participants' subjective experiences. Participants were recruited through criterion- and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to gather data, which was analyzed by using a thematic network analysis.

All participants experienced language proficiency as key to integration, as education, employment and social networks were seen as pivotal aspects of becoming a member of the Norwegian society. Participants found it challenging to live by themselves and adjust to Norwegian culture, in addition to facing language barriers and scrutiny from own cultural communities. The Somali- and Syrian refugees further experienced differing challenges, such as discrimination and job-related stress for the former group, while the latter group experienced frustration regarding their education progress.

By acknowledging language learning to be time-consuming, and understanding that cultural norms are stable aspects of a society, it appeared that participants found integration as a comprehensive process. Personal strength, social networks and possibilities such as educational loans and language classes, were resources used by most of the participants in order to cope with challenges. All of them desired education and future careers; motivational aspects that made language learning meaningful. As it appeared that they found integration worthy of time and effort, participants were seen as in control of their health and quality of life.

Keywords: Somali, Syrian, Unaccompanied, Female, Refugees, Integration, Well-being, Challenges, Resources, Salutogenesis.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

Adult Education	Free secondary school courses for adult above 25
BRC	Bergen Red Cross
GRRs	General Resistance Resources
IMDi	Directorate of Integration and Diversity
InqScribe Software	Digital transcription tool
Introduction Programs	Educational programs for foreign nationals between 18-55
Leksehjelp for voksne	BRC-volunteer run activity for those in Adult Education
NAV	Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
NVivo Software	Digital tool for analysis
PTSD	Post Dramatic Stress-disorder
RWTN	“Refugees Welcome to Norway”: a volunteer-based organization. Provides humanitarian needs for resettled refugees.
SOC	Sense of Coherence
UDI	The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
UNHCR	United Nation High Commissioner Refugee Agency
WHO	World Health Organization

## **Chapter One: Introduction.**

### **1.1 Introduction.**

One out of every 108 individuals on earth were displaced people at the end of 2018 (UNHCR, 2019), and the number keeps growing, as 70.8 million are at present time forced to leave their homes, among them 25.9 million refugees (UNHCR, 2019). The war in Syria and ongoing violence on the Horn of Africa, has forced millions of people to seek safety in Europe, highlighting the importance of integration in a more multicultural world than ever before. A refugee is defined by the Norwegian Refugee Council (2019), as a person who fears persecution due to religion, race or political opinion, or feels he or she cannot be protected in their home country due to war or violence. Having a status as a refugee is based on humanitarian reasons for protection, or being a resettlement (quota) refugee, i.e., a refugee who is transferred to a third country, coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and host country.

Although the refugee influx in Norway is reported to be the lowest yet in the last 20 years, there has been an 2.5 % increase of refugees arriving since 2018, making the number of refugees in total to be 233 800, and thus 4.4 % of the Norwegian population (Strøm, 2019). Somali refugees used to be the largest refugee group in Norway, as the number of Somali refugees increased during the 1980- and 1990s (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2009), but the influx of Syrians has led this latter group to be the current largest refugee group, equivalent to 29 500 people, with Somalis following as the second largest group at 27 500 (Strøm, 2019). Syrian refugees encompass 25% of all quota refugees in Norway (Strøm, 2019), while 40% of the Somali refugees, as a single national group, arrived as family reunification refugees (i.e., when family is reunited with a person who has refugee status), corresponding to 18% of all family reunification refugees in total. During 2019, 105 Syrian women applied for asylum in Norway next to 92 Syrian men, while only one Somali woman did the same, in contrast to 9 Somali men (UDI, 2019). It is considered dangerous for refugee women to travel alone, as they face risks such as sexual abuse and violence. Whether these women arrived unaccompanied or together with men - is unknown. In this thesis, “unaccompanied” will from here on refer to refugee women arriving in a host country without any family members.

Instead of operating with a formal definition of integration, Norwegian politicians consider employment as a means to integrate; in addition to employment being important

for self-esteem and financial independence, employment is argued to strengthen language proficiency and social connections (Enes, 2017). The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet) (IMDi) is responsible for the introduction programs that refugees are obliged to complete, that cover Norwegian training and social studies, education- and employment-oriented measures (IMDi, 2016). The aim of integration policies in Norway is for 70% of the refugees participating in introduction programs, to either have gotten a job or to be enrolled in studies within a year after completing the course (Enes, 2017). In 2017, the percentage of Somali women reaching this goal was relatively low (30%). Attendance by Syrian women is still fairly new, and its therefore difficult to say how well they are integrated according to statistics.

Studies usually research minors when addressing “unaccompanied” refugees, and it therefore seems as if there is a gap in the research field regarding the relationship between unaccompanied adult women and integration. How the integration process is experienced by unaccompanied refugees, is to a large extent focused on measuring negative health outcomes such as anxiety, post-dramatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression among minors (Huemer, Karnik, Voelkl-Kernstock, Granditsch, Dervic, Friedrich & Steiner, 2009). Although struggles such as mental health-disorders, language barriers and discrimination have been reported by many researchers when researching integration, it is argued that focusing too much on struggles and challenges, is to ignore refugee’s resilience and strength (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Contributing to the research field concerning unaccompanied refugee women, the overall purpose of this study is to explore how well-being is affected by Somali- and Syrian refugee’s perceptions and experiences of integration. Findings could thus strengthen the knowledge of refugees’ strength and well-being. This latter term is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (2019) as “the state of feeling healthy and happy”, and is incorporated into the World Health Organization’s (WHO) (2019) definition of health promotion as “the process of enabling people to gain control over physical, social and mental well-being”. Throughout this thesis, “well-being” is from here on understood as a strong “Sense of Coherence”; a concept defined by Aaron Antonovsky (1993) as having an orientation to life being comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Antonovsky’s (1993) theory Salutogenesis, is the framework I use in order to explore my objectives, as it allows me to discover the resistance resources my participants use to cope with challenges of integrating. This study

could also inspire more effective interventions when unaccompanied refugees resettle into the Norwegian society.

This thesis is organized into 7 chapters. The theoretical framework of which the exploratory work is based, will be thoroughly presented next. Following, a literature review concerning research from the last decade will highlight a variety of findings relevant to the field of integration and well-being. How I gathered data for this study, and how quality was assured throughout this process will be presented, before findings are displayed and discussed. I briefly debate limitations I perceive this study to have, before finally presenting my conclusion and recommendations for future research.

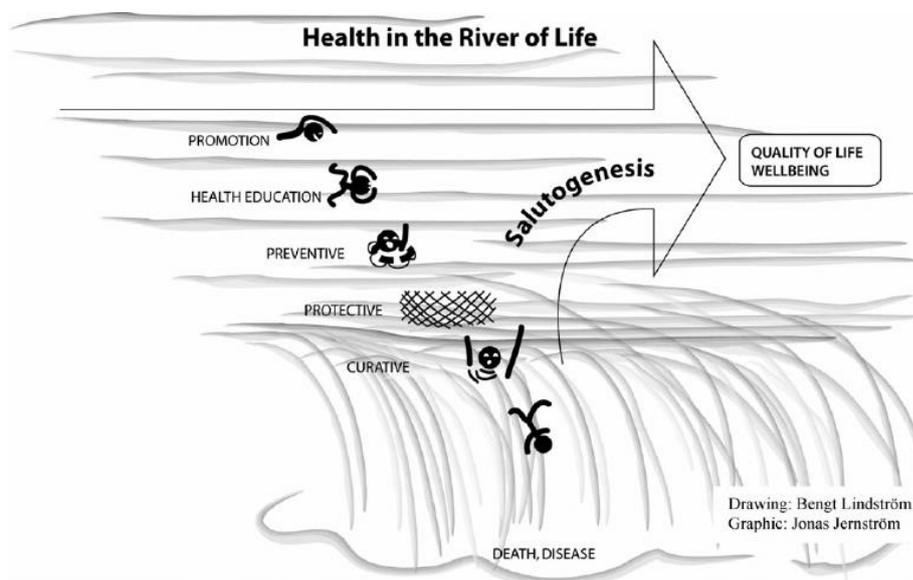
## **Chapter two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review.**

### **2.1 Theoretical framework.**

I applied the theory of Salutogenesis to explore the resistance resources unaccompanied Somali- and Syrian refugee women use, when they integrate into the Norwegian society. Aaron Antonovsky introduced the theory in 1979, after considering the conditions that make people more resourceful than others when facing difficult situations (Becker, Glascoff & Felts, 2010). Antonovsky (1993) perceived health to be a movement on a continuum of wellness and illness, and not something of which is either good or poor, arguing that people are always in movement between a state of healthy and unhealthy. By focusing on causes of health rather than disease, the theory thus considers the complexity of an individual, by looking at the environments and personal characteristics that improve and maintain well-being. (Becker et al., 2010).

The core concepts of his theory are “Sense of Coherence” (SOC) and “Generalized resistance resources” (GRRs). The former is understood as a positive orientation to life, by having the ability to grasp circumstances, while having the ability to use resources available to cope with them in a healthy way. This capability represents the components of SOC: “Comprehensibility” - the ability to understand one’s situation as clear and consistent; “Manageability” - finding oneself capable to cope with the situation by identifying and using available resources; and finally “Meaningfulness” - finding the demands of life meaningful and worthy of engagement (Eriksson, 2017). These components are also understood as cognitive-, behavioral- and motivational components (Lindström & Eriksson, 2006). SOC is considered to be universal, across gender and culture. It is argued that SOC develops from birth, together with experiences of historical- and sociocultural contexts (Mittelmark & Bauer,

2017). Context generates different psychosocial challenges, but life experiences offer resistance resources that shape the SOC, which is the fundamental idea behind Salutogenesis. It is suggested that GRRs - e.g., psychosocial-, biological and material factors (Lindström & Eriksson, 2006), make it possible for people to deal with challenges of different kind, and thus perceive life as understandable and manageable. Examples of GRRs are internal- and external resources such as self-esteem, social support and money (Lindström & Eriksson, 2006). According to Antonovsky (1993), managing a healthy life depends on having a strong SOC. The components of Salutogenesis is illustrated through the metaphor of “Health in the River of Life” (Figure 1), created by Lindström and Eriksson (2011), demonstrating that life is full of challenges and resources. The model illustrates how health is a responsibility of both the public and the individual, as treatment and education is needed in the case of disease, while exploring the factors that pull the “swimmer” down the waterfall of sickness and death. Yet, living a healthy life is also based on our own abilities, to identify and use resources in order to protect and improve our choices for a healthy life, thus learning “how to swim through challenges”.



**Figure 1:** “Health in the River of Life” developed by Lindström and Eriksson (2011).

The influence of SOC has been discussed by many. Kuittinen, Punamäki, Mölsä, Saarni, Tiilikainen & Honkasalo (2014) analyzed how a weak SOC indicated depressive symptoms among Somali refugees in Finland, while a strong SOC has been argued to correspond with higher well-being (Nilsson, Leppert, Simonsson & Starrin, 2010). A Salutogenic orientation, in contrast to a pathogenic perspective (where one explores causes of disease) (Ostberg, Graziotin, Wagner & Derntl, 2017), is suggested by Antonovsky (1996) to

be a well suited theoretical basis for health promotion, as implications of using SOC as a research guide, is a set of ideas that in partnership with preventative medicine guide action when promoting health. This is too stressed by Lindström and Eriksson (2011), who argue that if the concept of SOC is integrated into a learning model of health, Salutogenesis can strengthen the idea of health promotion (WHO, 2019) as the characteristics of SOC are similar to health promotion's values.

**2.2 Literature review.** The search process for this literature study was conducted by using the data bases Oria (the data base of the University of Bergen) and Google Scholar. The search process entailed using different terms that captured the essence of my research objectives. These terms included “single”, “unaccompanied” “adult”, “female”, “women”, “refugees”, “integration”, “resettled”, “experience” “well-being”, “challenges”, “resources” and “health”. I limited searches to peer reviewed literature, published from and after 2009.

Literature concerning the integration process of unaccompanied refugees are mostly centered around minors (i.e., under the age of 18) (Huemer et al., 2009; Seglem, Oppedal & Roysamb, 2014; Vervliet, Lammertyn, Broekaert & Derluyn, 2014; Keles, Idsøe, Friborg, Sirin & Oppedal, 2017). It is argued that unaccompanied minors are an understudied research group (Keles et al., 2017), which seems to be the case for unaccompanied adults as well. This is acknowledged by Seglem et al. (2014), who found few empirical studies to compare with when investigating the mental health among unaccompanied adult refugees. Risks for developing mental health issues is often the topic of investigation when studying unaccompanied refugees (Huemer et al., 2009). Not only are unaccompanied research subjects usually minors, they are also typically male. For instance, in Seglem et al.'s (2014) study, male participants equated to 81% of the participants. Smith (2013) however, explored the lived experiences of female refugees, by investigating the construction of intercultural identity across 14 countries, finding that female refugees inhabit a small network with little flexibility for identity formation. Studies rarely specify though, whether women arrived with or without family members, and seldom have their experience of integration as main topic. Shirazi and Caynan (2016) acknowledged this, when exploring factors that form quality of life for older Somali refugee women: “Very little has been written about older Somali women's experiences of forced migration and resettlement”. (Shirazi & Caynan, p. 21, 2016)

Literature concerning Syrians and integration, often revolve around work-life challenges and access to the labor market (Çetin 2016; Okenwa-Emegwa, Saboonchi & Tinghög, 2017; Hanley, Al Mhamied, Cleveland, Hajjar, Ghayda, 2018; Knappert, Kornay &

Figengül, 2018; Şimsek, 2018, Bucken-Knapp, Fakihi & Spehar, 2018). Though employment is seemingly a pivotal goal of integration by the Norwegian government, research indicates that entering the labor market can be difficult for refugees, due to lack of formal qualifications, language barriers, loss of identity and cultural differences (Shirazi & Caynan, 2016; Bredgaard & Thomsen, 2018; Gericke, Burmeister, Löwe, Deller & Pundt, 2018). Knappert et al., (2018) found that amongst their participants of both genders, Syrian women resettling in Turkey faced discrimination at work due to experiencing gendered roles, both at home and in host country, as well as experiencing sexually objectification in the workplace. Some work-related studies indicate Somali refugees to have a traditionally low employment rate (Kuittinen et al., 2014), but literature concerning Somali women specifically, frequently focuses on breast cancer screenings, family planning and reproductive health (Percac-Lima, Ashburner, Bond, Oo & Atlas, 2013; Agbemenu, Volpe & Dyer, 2018; Wojnar, 2015).

It is argued that addressing the mental health of refugees by researching trauma, is highly needed (Hall & Ollff, 2016) due to forced migration and exposure to war (Kirmayer, Narasiah, Munoz, Rashid, Ryder, Guzder, Hassan, Rousseau & Pottie 2011). However, research on the relationship between refugees and mental health issues has been criticized for being too much of a Western perspective, ignoring the importance of culture (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010; Green 2017). Post-arrival challenges entail more than PTSD, as literature highlight challenges of language barriers, discrimination and inability to join social groups (Fang, Sixsmith, Lawthom, Mountian & Shahrin, 2015). Lenette, Brough and Cox (2012) found that single Sundanese refugee mothers experienced scrutiny from communities (i.e. people from their own cultural background) when resettling in Australia. They experienced gossip and suspicion from other community women, regarding being single and not wanting to get married. Altunkaynak (2018) found that Syrian refugees experienced language barriers, due to locals in Turkey not wanting to form relationships with them. Similarly, friendships between the ethnic population in Finland and Somali refugees, were argued to be rare (Kuittinen et al., 2014). Language barriers were found to make Syrian refugees in Germany hesitant to book health care appointments, as they did not feel they could express themselves, and at the same time finding language classes inaccessible due to long waiting lists (Green, 2017). Also, when exploring post-arrival struggles of Somali and Iraqi refugees in the UK (Fang et al. 2015), Somali refugees experienced name calling in the streets and was portrayed as untrustworthy in the media.

Despite a strong focus on challenges, literature concerning resources seems to be growing. Social support is argued to play a pivotal role in well-being of refugees (Luster, Qin, Bates, Johnson and Rana, 2009; Shirazi & Caynan, 2016). Gericke et al. (2018) found social capital to be a source for obtaining employment, when interviewing 36 Syrian refugees resettling in Germany, and Baird (2012) found that refugees who kept traditional cultural practices in addition to those of the host country, were better adjusted to handling changes. Support from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) was also seen as a major support, not only for language services, but for social connections and help to build personal assets. In addition, inner resources such as acceptance of one's situation and focusing on the future was found as a coping strategy by Luster et al. (2009), who interviewed ten Sudanese refugee boys resettling after fleeing from civil war.

A central gap is thus the lack of literature regarding the integration experience of unaccompanied refugee women, as well as the relationship between this experience and well-being. This study will help fill this gap and contribute to the growing literature concerning resources when refugees resettle.

## **Chapter Three: Objectives and Research Questions.**

### **3.1. Developing the objectives.**

To meet the gaps identified above, I defined the following objective and research questions in order to explore the integration process of unaccompanied refugee women from Somalia and Syria resettling in Norway; the challenges they face during this process; and the resistance resources they identify and use when coping with these challenges. By exploring these, I aim to make connections between their integration process and well-being.

**3.2. Research objective:** To explore how unaccompanied Somali- and Syrian refugee women experience integration, and how this affects their well-being.

### **3.3. Research questions:**

- What are the challenges of integrating in the Norwegian society for unaccompanied Somali- and Syrian refugee women?
- What are the resistance resources unaccompanied Somali- and Syrian refugee women use when integrating in the Norwegian society?

## **Chapter Four: Methodology, Ethics and Quality.**

### **4.1 Introduction.**

In this chapter, after a brief description of philosophical standpoints, I will present my selected design and the reasons for my choices throughout the research process. Following, method utilized for data gathering and my analytical approach will be presented, and the different processes of ensuring quality and ethical considerations will be stressed. Limitations that I perceive the research project to have will be presented in the discussion chapter.

**4.2 Philosophical standpoints.** Ontology is a philosophical branch of philosophy that holds assumptions regarding what reality and fundamental truth can be claimed to be (Neuman, 2011). As I believe reality is to be influenced by subjectivity and a cultural lens, I lean to a nominalist side if one were to look at ontology as a “continuum” (Neuman, 2011, p 93). A nominalist perspective influences one’s epistemological standpoint (i.e. how one obtains knowledge regarding truth), in such a way that an interpretation of participants’ comprehension of a phenomenon results in a socially constructed reality. My epistemological standpoint is thus affiliated to interpretivism, a perspective that aims to understand an individual’s appreciation of a phenomenon, by considering contexts and beliefs. As an interpretive approach is sensitive to people’s experiences, and thus a tool for approaching people’s view of the world through empathy, an interpretive standpoint is seen as most appropriate when addressing my research questions.

**4.3 Research design.** As I sought to interpret perceptions of a phenomenon and explore someone’s individual reality, I utilized a qualitative research approach - allowing me to develop a better appreciation of how individuals attach meanings to a phenomenon. This differs from quantitative research, as this latter approach explores a relationship between variables, in order to see how it is connected to causal links and interventions (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). The former approach was considered appropriate by my ontological- and epistemological standpoint; I wanted to understand my participants’ experience of integrating when coming to a new country all alone, and how this affects other factors in their life.

In order to answer this study’s objectives, phenomenology was chosen as research design. Phenomenological research “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p.57). As this study explored how unaccompanied Somali- and Syrian refugee women experience integration, this latter concept is therefore the phenomenon. Through a phenomenological design, one collects

data from appropriate participants, most often through interviews with open-ended questions, and then provides a comprehensive description of the essence. In this study this entails a description of how my participants experienced integration in relation to challenges and resources. The data gathering of this experience was conducted by doing interviews.

#### **4.4. Data generation.**

**4.4.1 Study area.** Two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and these were done in Bergen, Norway. This is the second largest city in Norway with a population of 281, 978 (SSB, 2019). Bergen is my hometown and my residence during my thesis work, and this was also the location in which local contacts helped me when I recruited participants. The final four interviews were done through phone- and Facebook calls, thus the study area varied between Bergen and small cities on the Western- and Southern part of Norway. The number of residents in Norway that have a refugee background is 4,4 % of the Norwegian population (Strøm, 2019).

**4.4.2 Participants.** Table 1 below demonstrates the participants in this study: three refugee women from Somalia, and three refugee women from Syria. Inclusion criterion for participants in the study were that they: (1) had to have arrived as refugees without husbands or other family members, (2) had to be 18 years or older, (3) had to be familiar with introduction courses in Norway, either by completing them or being enrolled in them, and (4) needed to speak either English or Norwegian so they could understand the reasons for my study and implications. According to Creswell (2007), 5-25 participants are appropriate for phenomenological studies, and according to Starks, Brown, and Trinidad (2007), a typical sample size ranges from 1 to 10 participants. I initially aimed to have five Somali refugee women, and five Syrian refugee women. However, I decided on seeing myself finished with the recruitment process (of which to be described in sections below) after interviewing six participants in total, due to the study's time limitations, as well as finding myself within both Creswell's (2007) and Starks et al.'s (2007)s recommended number of participants. I did not have inclusion criterion regarding amount of time participants had spent in Norway, though statistically the two groups differ in this matter and it could affect experiences when integrating. This was due to advice from gatekeepers (i.e. people who can facilitate access to specific people (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015)), specifically coworkers in Bergen Red Cross (BRC), regarding the fact that traveling alone as a refugee is highly dangerous, and thus unaccompanied refugee women are few in numbers and difficult to reach. I therefore did not feel I could complicate the recruitment process any further. The groups of Somali- and Syrian

refugees in this study did however differ slightly regarding time spent in Norway, as well as in age. I considered setting an age limit, as I assume experiences regarding integration would differ between young “twenty-somethings”, and for instance someone in their fifties with more life experience. All however, except for one who recently turned thirty at the time of the interview, were in their twenties. Most of the participants met the criterion regarding travelling unaccompanied by family members. Two out of six came with family members. I decided to accept this, as participants were difficult to reach in the first place due to the danger of travelling alone. All of them spoke Norwegian, though their language skills varied. Some of them spoke English.

*Table 1: Participants in the study.*

Pseudonym	Age	Country of origin	Place of residence in Norway	Time spent in Norway	Accompanied by	Education, occupation
Uba	30	Somalia	Hordaland	4 years	None	- Adult education. - Working as personal assistant, volunteering.
Khadiija	27	Somalia-Etiopia	Hordaland	4 years	None	- Adult education - Volunteering.
Shamshi	26	Somalia	Vest-Agder	8 years	None	- Adult education. - Works temporary in home nursing care.
Yamina	25	Syria	Møre og Romsdal	3 years	Sister	- Adult education.
Joelle	24	Syria	Arendal	3,5 years	Son	- Adult education.
Dareen	22	Syria	Oppland	2 years	None	- Adult education. - Volunteering.

**4.4.3 Recruitment process.** I felt slightly anxious in relation to finding participants that met my criterion, due to gatekeepers telling me they would be hard to find. Nevertheless, I decided to do a combination of criterion- and snowballing sampling. Through the former technique, one finds participants that meet decided upon criterion: characteristics that participants share so they can provide thorough information to one’s study (Punch, 2014). I volunteered in one of BRC’s activities, Leksehjelp for voksne (Homework help for adults), where I was allowed to ask if anyone who met my criterion would agree to be interviewed. I found three participants that met my criterion, and all of them agreed to partake in my study. I managed to interview only two of them, as one of them did not show up. I asked the remaining two if they could refer me to others, as they perhaps knew of other unaccompanied refugee women. This latter technique, snowball sampling, refers to people helping me find relevant individuals that too have rich information regarding my study (Punch, 2014). My

participants did not know anyone else, thus snowball sampling seemed unsuccessful, as also additional organizations and gatekeepers I later approached said they did not have relevant people for my study (or did not respond at all). I eventually asked friends of mine, who either works for refugee organizations, or within the field of integration in the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), if they could connect me to potential participants. I gave them a “Form of Consent”-letter (in which information of the study was described), for them to pass on to potential participants (please see Appendix 1 and 2 for “Form of Consent”). One of my friends managed to recruit one participant for me this way, who lived in Central Norway. The final three participants were recruited by the helpful tip from one of my friends, to contact the organization “Refugees Welcome to Norway” (RWTN), an organization that aims to welcome refugees into their new countries and help them with accommodation and humanitarian needs (RWTN, 2019). RWTN stems from the international organization Refugees Welcome International, administered from Germany. Some of the employees in RWTN knew potential participants and passed on my information, or “knew someone who knew someone”, and thus referred me to participants that met the criterion and agreed to partake. The participants’ residence varied between different cities South of Norway, so I had to interview them through phone and Facebook messenger calls. The snowball sampling, in combination of purposive sampling, worked after all.

**4.4.4 Method of data collection.** Different types of data can be collected through a phenomenological design. Creswell (2007) mentions observation, journals and art to be types of data one can collect, in addition to in-depth- and multiple interviews. Similarly, Starks et al. (2007) argue that a mix of data can be collected, but interviewing is the most frequently used method in a qualitative design. An in-depth interview is defined as a one-to-one conversation between a researcher and his or her participant, who provides information on a phenomenon from the participant’s perspective (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). I chose in-depth interviews over observation, journals and multiple interviews, as I enjoy talking with people face-to-face and found this method to give me the richest (most informative) data, and because I have previous experience with interviewing one-on-one. Observation did not seem relevant as integration together with challenges and resources, are concepts I find easier to talk about than observe. In addition, even though I wanted to grasp the essence of an experience shared by a group of people, I appreciate different views of a phenomenon. Group interviews were thus ruled out due to several reasons: I wanted my participants to think in-depth about their experience, as well as talking about their struggles and emotions; fleeing

one's country due to war and leaving your family behind is a sensitive and personal topic, with what I assume to involve very much individual experiences, perhaps not suitable for a group discussion. I thus found a one-on-one conversation to be safer for the participants. I also wanted to have the opportunity to probe answers – a common technique in an in-depth interview by asking following up-questions to unclear answers, or if I wanted them to elaborate (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015), whereas in a group discussion the participants talk to each other, and the researcher ideally speaks less than what they would do in a one-to-one interview (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). As I thought my participants would be hard to find in the first place, a group discussion would be difficult to arrange as well. Interpretation of journals and art however, could have been a suitable addition to in-depth interviews, as a combination of methods could lead to a more thorough appreciation and credibility of a phenomenon. Due to time limits of this study however, only in-depth interviews were conducted.

The interviews with the participants I met face-to-face were conducted in locations suggested by me. One of them was conducted in a café, the other in a classroom at Bergen University. The former location felt private enough for the participant to speak freely, as few people were present in the café. For the interviews conducted through phone- and Facebook calls, both the participant and I were sitting in our homes at the time of the call. Each interview lasted about fifty to sixty minutes. One of the interviews by phone had the limitations of bad audio, which I further describe in “Limitations” in the discussion chapter.

The interviews were constructed to be semi-structured interviews, that are conversations guided by topics one wants to explore, whilst not having a rigorous set of questions that one cannot divert from (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). This allowed me to be flexible if the interviewee said something particularly interesting, adapting questions to the situation and asking them questions I perhaps had not prepared in advance. This differs from structured interviews where one has less flexibility, as questions must be asked the way they are printed. I asked open-ended questions that allow participants to talk about feelings and personal views of a topic, and I was able to elaborate if something was unclear. I utilized the technique of probing, and the interview guide was influenced by the study's theoretical framework - Antonovsky's (1993) Salutogenesis. The questions revolved around challenges, resources and happiness, as well as motivation in relation to integration. Probing questions were attached to the guide regarding education and employment, as I wanted to ask them about these topics if they did not bring them up themselves. Please see Appendix 3 and 4 for

interview guides (as I designed a second interview guide that made it easier for me to switch between topics during conversations).

**4.4.5 Data management.** All of my participants signed a Form of Consent (Appendix 1 and 2), agreeing to have the interview audio recorded using my own phone. The recordings were uploaded on to a laptop to which only I knew the password. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized using IncScribe Software (Inqscribe, 2018). This allowed me to slow down audio if needed, and thoroughly transcribe what was being said. Names and cities, as well as workplaces that could be linked to each participant, were anonymized in order to protect identities. Each participant was given a pseudonym. Audio recordings were deleted when I finished transcribing. The transcriptions were the data for my analysis.

#### **4.5 Analytical approach.**

Data gathered from six interview sessions was the material used for a hybrid approach of thematic network analysis. Steps of this approach was influenced by both Skovdal and Cornish (2015) and Attride-Stirling (2001). The first step of analysis started both during and after transcribing the interviews, as I read and re-read data while writing down thoughts that developed while reading. This was suggested as a first step by Skovdal and Cornish (2015), as getting familiar with data lays the foundation for unpacking stories within the data. I was henceforth influenced by Attride-Stirling (2001), as the next step entailed breaking up the text in order to develop a coding framework - a list of labels that summarize chunks of text that seem meaningful. Transcriptions were coded electronically using NVivo Software version 12. According to Attride-Stirling (2001), a coding framework tends to be conducted on the basis of theoretical interests, preestablished topics or recurrent issues from the text itself. I definitely had topics in mind when I conducted the interviews, and by re-reading the transcriptions, ideas of what seemed to be the essence started to emerge. I did however start to develop the coding framework as if I were a stranger reading the data for the first time. This way, codes were strongly grounded to the data and not influenced by research questions or theory, allowing me to gain a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon. The analysis thus far was not a linear process; I re-read initial codes several times and started to reduce- and group those that related to each other. Hereafter, I arranged themes into coherent groups, now basing them on theoretical concepts and objects of my study - clustering themes into basic principles, and then into more shared issues of organizing themes. I finally deduced global themes in the light of these, capturing the core of the text and producing a coding framework which was the tool for my investigation of research objectives. The analysis chosen is thus a

hybrid, by starting out open-minded inductively, and progressing deductively by considering theory and research questions.

## 4.6 Quality

I judged the quality of this research process by considering the concepts of credibility, dependability and transferability; jargons proposed to better evaluate trustworthiness of qualitative research (Yilmaz, 2013), outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

**4.6.1 Credibility.** Credibility is achieved when findings make sense for readers and participants, as well as one can be confident that methods taken are appropriate for the study. To ensure credibility I carefully considered which method and analysis would be feasible for this study (as described earlier in this chapter). As I gathered data from my participants, I kept asking them if I had understood them correctly, allowing them to clarify- or correct me. This is understood as “member checking” (Cope, 2014); a strategy that allows participants to validate the researcher’s interpretation. By interviewing all participants close to an hour each, I gathered rich description of their individual and social setting (Yilmaz, 2013), offering thus a truthful image of the participants’ context, allowing participants to recognize themselves and letting readers enter and understand the setting under investigation. By writing and re-reading the transcripts, as well as sharing and discussing them with my supervisor, I discussed and reflected upon the findings while considering what quotations would mostly justify them. This process also gave me to opportunity to reflect upon my role as a researcher (described further down), by considering how my presence could influence answers given during interviews. In addition, “triangulation” is proposed to enhance credibility by using multiple sources to gain comprehensive conclusions. I did collect data from two different groups (Somali and Syrian women) at different settings, thus gathering multiple perspectives of the phenomenon integration. However, though gathering data from multiple methods such as both interviews and observation, is the most common form of triangulation (Cope, 2014), as well as considered appropriate within a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2007), I only conducted interviews.

**4.6.2 Dependability.** This term is understood as consistency of the research process, across researchers and conditions (similar to reliability in quantitative research) (Yilmaz, 2013). By discussing transcripts and progress with my supervisor (as well as fellow students who considered my codes and themes), my strategies were reviewed by other individuals, producing thus an “audit trail” that documents my decisions and enhances dependability (Cope, 2014). I aimed to make steps taken visually clear, by providing details regarding

purpose of study, methods and analysis, as well as presenting my interview guide, codes and themes. By using an interview guide, I asked all participants the same questions. By recording the interviews, transcriptions were written from actual discussions and thus not from memory.

**4.6.3 Transferability.** This last term refers to one's ability to demonstrate how findings are applicable to other groups or settings. Cope (2014) argues that this type of quality is relevant if the aim is to provide generalizations about the phenomenon studied. I intend to situate the participants' experience of integration, to how they are similar and different from other studies. This will be carried out in the discussion chapter.

**4.6.4 The role of the researcher.** As mentioned, I reflected upon my role as a researcher by considering how my position and background could influence the participants' trust, which is important for rich data (Cope, 2014). I also aimed to reflect upon whether any preconceptions I had of the phenomenon would affect my interpretation of findings.

I am born in Norway and have not experienced the need to flee a country due to war. I have never had the need to integrate into a new society. I am, however, a student of Development Studies and Health Promotion, interested in changes in the world and thus aware of the refugee influx during the last couple of years. I stressed to the participants that my aim as a student was to understand their view of integration and how this affects health – and not whether their integration was done in a right or wrongly way. Though some of my participants had undertaken higher education in their home countries, I was higher educated than most of them, which could be seen as a power imbalance. However, I did not get the impression that they felt inferior, as they spoke freely about their dreams for the future, involving higher education and jobs. I think they saw me as another woman with dreams for the future, and as I disclosed some knowledge of their country's geography and history, I think I made them realize that I was genuinely interested in them and their stories.

Prior to recruitment of participants, I wondered if being a white female from the west, would cause tension of dynamic imbalance as we are of different nationalities. I did not however get this impression. I had met one of my participants before, through a prior group project I conducted through my study program in collaboration with BRC. I have later helped this participant with homework, and sometimes we pass each other on the street (during which we stop for a quick "Hello" and "How are you"). Two of my participants were recruited through my work as an intern in the Red Cross – which is a well-known organization throughout the world, through which many of the participants had joined activities. One

participant was recruited through a fellow friend with whom I went to elementary school. I think my background as a Development-student and Red Cross-worker, as well as being a “friend of a friend”, helped create rapport and trust.

#### **4.7 Ethics**

Due to harmful social studies in the past, development of research ethics has been constant since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Punch, 2014); avoidance of harm during the research process is the responsibility of the researcher (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). Several steps were taken to ensure this. As I would manage personal details of participants, the study gained clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (clearance was later renewed as I postponed the date for the thesis’ submission,). Please see Appendix 5 and 6 for clearance. During recruitment I verbally or in written form explained participants why I approached them with the purpose of my study. They received the Form of Consent, in which purpose of the study and their rights are more thoroughly explained. The form was originally in English, but I made a Norwegian copy since most of my participants were not fluent in English. The form also stressed that the study was voluntary, and the option of withdrawing was always present.

As some of my participants were approached by gatekeepers, I briefed them once more when I talked to them myself, to make sure they had understood the purpose. All participants signed the form, and either handed it back personally while keeping a copy for themselves or sent me a picture of a signed form. Anonymity of their identities would be of paramount focus; names were therefore given pseudonyms during transcriptions, and names of cities were anonymized. Participants also gave me permission to use a cell phone to record the interview. Audio recordings were deleted after transcribing the interviews. I encouraged them to contact me if they needed to talk after our interviews, or mentioned relevant people and places to contact, in case the topic stirred up memories from fleeing their countries. All of participants have been given the opportunity to access this finished thesis.

## **Chapter Five: Findings.**

### **5.1 Introduction.**

In this chapter I will present findings concerning 4 global themes I identified when conducting a thematic network analysis, guided by the steps proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001). The following section presents 4 global themes: (1) Perceptions about integration, (2) Challenges when integrating, (3) Resources when integrating and (4) Happiness. They will be

presented together with information regarding the interviews themselves, and reasons for exploring different concepts. This leads to the presentation of organizing themes that form sub-sections, where I elaborate how participants from both countries (described when appropriate as two groups) shared similarities and differences. A table of themes is attached in Appendix 7.

## **5.2 Perceptions about integration.**

All participants were asked how they understood the term integration, and later asked through probing whether they saw getting an education and acquiring a job as pivotal, as this is stressed as important by Norwegian politicians. I meant it was central to explore how they understood integration, in order to recognize how they experienced this term not only in theory, but in real life. This would also give me the opportunity to discuss how their experience of integration related to challenges, resources and well-being. The participants did not really have a specific notion on what integration meant to them, at least not through a clear statement. In fact, one of the participants said in the beginning of the interview that she did not think about integration at all. More thorough opinions did however emerge as we talked, that varied from integration being something one did, to something one felt. This global theme encompasses 3 organizing themes: (1) Being able to understand, (2) An effort, and (3) A core feeling.

**5.2.1 Being able to understand.** Learning the Norwegian language was identified as a central perception of integration throughout the interviews. More than half of the participants talked about how learning the language was (in its own meaning) integration, and both groups were represented rather equally on this matter. I asked them what integration meant to them, and later I asked them specifically if getting a job or education was related to this. Language was the common denominator, which made it possible to even have a job in the first place. Being able to talk and understand opened up to being social (like going to the movies and restaurants with friends), learning how to drive, and being able to ask colleagues to clarify work-jargons and routines. Both groups talked about language being the key to understand how the society works, by understanding norms and culture, and to talk to neighbors and fellow students:

*So, integration, I think it is important to learn language because it is very hard to be a part of the society if you have not learned the language. And also, it is very hard to get a job too... It is very hard because you can't, if you don't know the language... And when you wish to, for*

*instance, have a life, it is for instance when you need to see a doctor. (Uba, 30 years old, Somalia).*

*If you study with Norwegians, then you become integrated in the society. For instance, I go to school with other pupils, they don't have anyone from my country in the class, they are all Norwegian, so I think it's better to talk Norwegian and understand everything about new culture and how they think, and stuff like that. (Joelle, 24 years old, Syria).*

**5.2.2 An effort.** Clearly, understanding the language of their new country seemed to be a central part of how integration was interpreted. Making the effort it takes to learn language, as well as getting to know people while being respectful of culture, was stressed too by more than half when talking about how language was integration. Both groups mentioned how effort is needed to learn the language, by doing more than just going to introduction programs and language classes. It was also mentioned, in relation to Norwegians being more reserved than people from their home countries (to be presented in a different global theme later), that the dedication to engage in social gatherings, such as a very Norwegian thing “dugnad”, was a part of the integration process:

*Yes, to become a part of the society, and you can show that you are interested, right? To do things, and you will learn Norwegian. That is a way in that you join in and arrange and such and make some good food. Do your part. Things like that. That works better. (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

*Yes, if you stick to yourself, not being good at talking and learning, and go out and work and find someone to talk to, then you will never integrate into our society. I think you have to work on yourself, to be a part of a new society. (Joelle, 24 years old, Syria).*

More than half of the participants talked about making an effort to be respectful, and both groups discussed this in relation to accepting and adjusting to Norwegian culture, as well as the importance of Norwegians being more open minded about other cultures. Also, for the time they had spent in Norway, which differed slightly between all participants, they had experienced stress from other refugees from their home countries (also to be presented in another theme regarding challenges later). For instance, Khadiija talked about how within the Somali community, the idea of integrating with the Norwegian society is by many considered impossible if one wears a hijab. In her opinion however, this should not be a problem if you make an effort to be open-minded about their new society: *I think they have a misunderstanding. Integration. Yeah. They can wear their hijab and they can integrate [people]. It's a matter of how open you are. (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).*

As participants experienced Norwegians to be more reserved, participants discussed how respecting each other's behavior and choices should be an equal effort. Bringing own culture

into Norway felt for this participant natural, as she perceived Norway to be a country of diverse cultures:

*I think it's important to... That you bring your culture, because I think it's important for the country firstly, I believe, that we... That we have several cultures. That we understand each other, how they have... Many values, different food, clothes, languages. I don't know how the Norwegians think about the new cultures and such, I don't know, but I think it's good that I bring my culture here, in the country. And that I understand the other cultures that are here. (Joelle, 24 years old, Syria).*

**5.2.3 A core feeling.** As we further discussed how integration was interpreted throughout the interview, I asked how much they actually felt integrated. Some of the participants thus expressed integration to be a feeling, mostly participants from Syria. This was due to knowing the language, having friends and the enthusiasm of studying and getting a job (despite experiencing stress from others, concerning identify expectations): *I probably feel integrated here, because I don't have problems. I think maybe that I don't speak perfectly Norwegian, but I can understand. (Joelle, 24 years old, Syria).*

*For instance, for me who lives here in Norway for a little more than four years, I had worked about three years, and I have learned Norwegian, and I have mostly Norwegian friends. (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

### **5.3 Challenges when integrating.**

Amidst the feelings of being part of the society and learning the language to integrate, the participants experienced challenges. I wanted to explore this topic in order to investigate how much this would affect their SOC, and thus how this affects well-being when integrating. I therefore asked how integrating into the Norwegian society had been challenging, and why they thought this was the case. They were also asked specifically through probing, if they had experienced discrimination and difficulties with language. Even though participants shared some very similar experiences, findings also revealed differences between the groups. This global theme proved to be the largest, encompassing 6 organizing themes: (1) Language barriers, (2) Challenges within oneself, (3) Job-related stress, (4) Negative perceptions from others, (5) Stress from own community, and (6) Culture clash with Norwegians.

**5.3.1 Language barriers.** As previously presented, learning the Norwegian language was part of their perceptions of integration, and as participants shared how they did not know the language well in the beginning, this proved to be a hinder for participating in daily life when resettling a couple of years ago. Language barriers was something I understood to be a major challenge, as it was shared by more than half of the participants. Representing both

groups, language barriers made it difficult to socialize. For instance, for this participant it caused difficulties by not being able to participate in conversations at work:

*For us, it is difficult with language you know. When I started my first [job], I started as Home Care, afterwards everybody is speaking with each other, right? And I feel “Argh...” It’s a little bad when you can’t speak Norwegian well, and they try to ask you things... (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

Some mentioned that learning the language was difficult despite much effort, due to arriving in Norway as an adult and being in a language class (introduction program) with other foreigners who could not speak Norwegian well either. Other challenges were that methods taught in language class were not efficient enough. Participants from both Somalia and Syria said they learned dialects from practicing Norwegian with friends and colleagues, as they only learned “Bokmål” (Book Norwegian) in class. One participant said they watched an American movie in language class, with the purpose of learning Norwegian from reading the subtitles: *When I go to Norwegian class here, I have learned almost nothing. At school we just, for instance, we have three-four hours, and we have only seen «Big Mama» [movie] (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

**5.3.2 Challenges within oneself.** Personal struggles were findings that accumulated into this organizing theme, involving amongst others - being on your own in a new country, loneliness and frustration over lost education. For instance, starting a new life completely alone was by almost everyone discussed as challenging in the beginning. When I asked them about challenges in general, most of them started to share their stories of coming to Norway years ago - seeing snow for the first time and explaining how life was prior to learning Norwegian, as if they were telling a story with a clear beginning and end. Participants thus shared very similar experiences concerning being on their own and having to adapt to a country’s norms and attitudes; when everything is new, understanding how to behave and get around in town becomes a challenge:

*So, when I come her to Norway, that life becomes completely different. So, I have to work by myself, cook on my own, and it was the first time I had lived in a reception center that is located in uhm, Northern Norway. So, I didn’t know how to cook at all. (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

*It is very difficult when you arrive in a country, and then you don’t understand what you are supposed to do, how do you go out, buy food? Anything. How are you supposed to live in a country? Don’t always know. (Dareen, 22, Syria).*

During the interviews I also asked them about their living situation, whether they lived alone or with people. Most of them lived by themselves, which was challenging for almost

everyone, as having an apartment by themselves was different from their previous life. Both groups shared experiences of feeling isolated when living alone, as well as chores and finances felt more difficult to handle when you do not share it with someone:

*Yes, it is a little boring to live alone when you are used to live... Have people around you. But when I lived in Somalia, I had...It was a lot of people, but when you come to Norway and live alone, it becomes a little scary. Or... L little like, you're not social. You become closed off.* (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).

*Oh, it is very hard. It is very had when you live alone. When you have to look after money, food, cleaning and other things. And then you have to study too. With all that time, I think it is very difficult.* (Dareen, 22, Syria).

Fleeing to a new country and starting a life on your own, facing strange norms and culture while living alone, were thus personal challenges shared by most participants. Some personal struggles that emerged however, were of much more disparity. All participants were asked about their network, in order to explore how perhaps a social life could be a resource for managing integration and its struggles. The basic theme of loneliness was only applicable to the majority of participants from Syria, who shared thoughts about lonesomeness when I asked about their network: *No, I don't have that many other friends for me, so I only have a friend who lives in Germany, who is on my phone. I can't think of any others.* (Dareen, 22, Syria).

Another finding that I understood as a personal struggle when integrating, which again did not apply to those from Somalia, was frustration regarding lost education. I asked all participants how well they felt integrated, and if there were things that motivated their integration process in particular. Most of them talked about devotion to learn language, but some of them also shared dreams of future careers, such as becoming a midwife or a social worker. Surprisingly, a majority of the participants from Syria then shared frustration in relation to education, as the education they had taken in Syria was not valid in Norway:

*Yes, I was supposed to study to become a lawyer, because that was my dream in Syria. But I come here, and it takes a long time, and I would be maybe forty-five when I am done with my education.* (Yamine, 25, Syria).

*It is hard because I studied in my homeland, and I studied engineering. When I came to Norway, it was different what others says, I couldn't get it with me from my home country. I study high school again once more; I have to study high school again. Do you understand? When you live in a country, it is four years I will lose.* (Dareen, 22, Syria).

**5.3.3 Job-related stress.** Although participants did not share through specific statements that getting a job was integration in itself, acquiring a job was still expressed when talking about being a part of society. Difficulties of this process was eventually shared.

Interestingly, this organizing theme too revealed a difference between the groups, as only participants from Somalia talked about job-related stress. As noted above, Syrians discussed frustration of education that perhaps could have led to a job, while Somalis discussed how they had for a long time been actively applying for jobs, which was difficult in itself: *It was no one who answered my... Maybe I had sent out a thousand CVs and applications, and it is no one who replied at all, positively or negatively.* (Uba, 30, Somalia).

Similarly, another participant from Somalia talked about how working both as a volunteer and an intern, still was not enough to acquire a job. In addition, thoughts about Syrians learning faster and being better at doing a job were also shared, which proved to be a basic theme on its own, as a majority of the Somali participants perceived Syrian refugees to have better luck at acquiring jobs: *I don't know, they are like skilled, I don't know, they are a bit... I think they work it before. (...) They help each other more, so they are a little better than us. We don't have much.* (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).

**5.3.4 Negative perceptions from others.** From my interview guide I asked the participants if they had experienced discrimination, but less than half of the them shared notions on this matter. Mostly Somali participants shared experiences, and sometimes these experiences were expressed when discussing other matters, such as whether jobs were relevant for integration, or how their confidence seemed to be strong (to be presented later). Verbal discrimination was experienced in relation to ethnicity and prejudice. One of the Somali participants had been asked by people sitting next to them at a restaurant, if her boyfriend had *bought* her in order for her to have a better life. She also experienced other types of suspicion: *I will tell you one thing. Since I came here to Norway, there are a lot of people who wonder for instance, immigrants they come here and just steal.* (Uba, 30, Somalia). Uba further expressed with a laugh, what others had asked her: *And there are some who asked me: "Do you make a lot of money from NAV?", and it sounded very strange to me, and I said: "I don't know where NAV is".*

A participant from Syria talked about what Norwegians had said, seemingly after having a bad experience with refugees in the past: *They said that Norwegians were positive and nice toward us, but after some trouble and such, yes they didn't want any contact with strangers: "It is enough.", like that.* (Yamina, 25, Syria).

Experiences regarding physical discrimination were only expressed by the Somalis, as two of them had experienced physical discrimination from Norwegians and other foreigners:

*A guy, he spit on me. He didn't spit like, his spit didn't come on my face or anything, but he like... It was Norwegian, he was white I don't know. (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).*

*One time I was going to shop in a store in [name on shopping center], a dress, and it is a foreign lady there. So, I don't know, maybe she thought I was stealing, she was following me around all the time. (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

**5.3.5 Stress from own community.** Both groups had contact with- or knew of people from their home country that lived in more isolated groups here in Norway. One of the most surprising themes that emerged from the data was stress experienced from these communities. This organizing theme could perhaps have been merged into the former, as negative perceptions from others, presented above, described discrimination in various forms. However, I found stress from own communities to be such a large finding, representing every participant in total. Interestingly, even though all of them experienced similar stressors within their communities, the reason behind them often differed between the groups. For instance, almost everyone discussed how being a woman was challenging within their community, but the reason for this being problematic differed. A majority of the Somalis talked about perceptions within their community, regarding how women should not work with and engage with the other sex. One of the participants from Syria however, talked about perceptions within her community - that refugee women are seen as more sensitive than refugee men; women were thought to be more emotional and scared of talking to strangers: *It should be the same for everyone who come alone, as a boy or a girl. It is very hard. It is not very hard for a boy, but for a girl, it is very hard. (Dareen, 22, Syria).*

Even one of the participants from Somalia shared thoughts about this, how Syrian refugee women are perceived differently than refugee men. When I asked if she had ideas whether integrating differed for other refugee groups, she talked about men finding unaccompanied Syrian women as inferior: *Oh Syrians they are more fucked up, sorry. If the girl come alone, they think she is whore! (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).* She further expressed why she had this idea: *"They are not good", they think like that. Unless she is married, and her husband will come after her or something like that.*

Participants from Somalia experienced too prejudice from men in their own community:

*I invite some boys, Somali boys, and I say: "Come I will cook". It wasn't like this always, I don't have a boyfriend or anything like that, I show hospitality you know, I cook and if you... Many boys, Somali boys, they don't cook like real Somali food. But after, they say: "Why don't you get married?". (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

Other types of stress within communities concerned becoming too Norwegian, in terms of what one wears, and what behavior one engages in. Half of the participants, though representing both groups, discussed how their communities exhibited prejudice and expected certain behaviors in relation to culture: *And I just thought, I come here, and probably I will get scolded for it, for example, if I spend too much time with Norwegian, and I'm not so much more than that.* (Uba, 30, Somalia). She further expressed: *There is one thing they wonder, if I lose the culture and I don't want to be with them, and there are some who says to me: "You are becoming "Norwegianed," , we know you are becoming Norwegian".*

*When I came here, there were many who don't like me, from Syria, because I was open, not so much, I am a little open and maybe drink some time a little, or I don't wear a hijab or such things. And there are many who don't like me. I was very shocked. I was very upset, very upset in the beginning due to many not liking me because of that.* (Joelle, 24, Syria).

Not being able to relate with the elder generation was something the Somali participants expressed, discussing how the elderly in their community were different from them:

*Most people I know, most of them work and study, they do a lot of things. But older people, it is very hard to know them, very hard. Or, they wonder, I don't know, maybe they think they will lose their culture.* (Uba, 30, Somalia).

**5.3.6 Culture clash with Norwegians.** As all countries differ in terms of culture and attitudes, participants discussed how getting to know Norwegians was challenging, both because Norwegians had too high expectations of their integration, and also as the participants thought their own religious traditions were scaring them off. In this last organizing theme, more than half discussed how interacting with Norwegians was difficult, due to Norwegians having a reserved personality. This emerged when we discussed different topics such as leisure time and challenges in general, and how *well* they felt integrated. All but one participant disclosed that they felt Norwegians were reserved and keeping to themselves: *They don't want to be with strangers and such. In Norway they think about them and say: "They are strangers, they cannot get to know us".* (Yamina, 25, Syria).

Wearing religious clothing, such as a hijab, was expressed as a challenge in relation to integrating with the Norwegian population. Half of the participants had thoughts about this, expressed mostly though by Syrians. Their perception of Norwegians being scared of hijabs and religion in general, was shared when they discussed how Norway is a country of diversity with many cultures that should merge together, as well as whether some refugee groups find it harder to integrate than others:

*Yes, I think those who come from Somalia or Syria who wear Hijab and such, not all Norwegians, but some of them get scared by it. How they have a hijab and such. They don't want contact, maybe just "Hi, how is it going, ok", but nothing more. (Yamine, 25, Syria).*

Two of the Somali refugees expressed when we discussed the term integration, how they could not live up to certain standards – that some Norwegians meant integration was to become 100% Norwegian and thus assimilate. Uba (30, Somalia) discussed this when being asked about the term integration, and mentioned the feeling of pressure from Norwegians and the media in general: *It is not so easy, even though I have made a good effort to learn language, but uhm, when I hear "integration" from others – I don't hear integration the way I have done, I hear assimilation*".

#### **5.4 Resources when integrating.**

In order to investigate their ability of finding life manageable and comprehensible, I asked them what they perceived to be resources when integrating. Diverse findings thus emerged when we discussed strengths and coping skills next to challenges. In similarity to previous global theme, perceptions of resources seemed to appear in our conversations while discussing other specific topics, and thus did not seem to be conscious efforts of managing challenges. I therefore interpreted some of their opinions and experiences to be resources by my own judgment. As perceptions of challenges varied between participants, their coping skills varied too and thus the thematic network developed 4 organizing themes: (1) Network and organizations, (2) Determination, (3) Norms and possibilities, and (4) Personal strength. These findings reveal differences yet again between the groups - as to how the resources are applied to different challenges.

**5.4.1 Network and organizations.** In addition to discussing strengths in general, I specifically asked them if they perceived network to be a type of resource. Through probing, they were asked if having a network was important for integrating. Many of them were confused by what "network" meant, but through clarification, different types of networks were mentioned when discussing challenges, mostly in relation to language barriers and managing life on their own. By more than half and representing both groups, Norwegians were mentioned as being helpful when integrating. Some participants used Norwegians as a resource when they needed help in general, like learning how to drive, while others used them as a means to learn language: *We have a friend, a Norwegian friend who often invites me. Yes, he helped me with learning how to drive, because going to driving school was very expensive. (Joelle, 24, Syria).*

*When I ask colleagues, when I don't understand, something that is a misunderstanding, I ask, for instance people at work, maybe someone I know well or someone I feel safe with, I ask "Can you explain?". (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

More than half of the participants from both groups, talked about the network of people in their inner circle, such as boyfriends and family. Again however, the utilization of this circle varied; having a boyfriend seemed a resource for both a Somali and Syrian participant, but for the latter a boyfriend was a resource for decreasing the feeling of loneliness and for feeling better if her community made her feel bad. For the former, this was a resource when learning the Norwegian language: *It helps when, for instance, when I use language, it helps. And for instance, if I write wrong with my boyfriend, he says "Maybe you should put this to the right place, this preposition..." Uhm, and stuff like that". Uba, 30, Somalia).*

Experts and people working at activity centers or volunteer organizations, were also discussed as a type of network used, when they wanted to make friends and learn language. Half of the participants discussed this, mostly Somalis. Some of them did mention health professionals: *My adviser, and my doctor here, they help me to go get friends, or going to the movies with someone. They say: "You can go there, you can get friends there, talk to kids your age". (Yamina 25, Syria).*

*When I moved here in [city anonymized], when I started to learn Norwegian, then there were very good services, for instance, uhm... Public library, they are doing it, I don't know if they have it still, but they had a reading group called "Women groups". (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

**5.4.2 Determination.** In the beginning of the interview, I asked the participants to briefly describe their lives. All were busy with either school or work; one of them even had multiple jobs. As presented in the first global theme, integration amongst other things was understood as something one did through effort. Even though participants did not specifically answer "getting a job" when asking how they understood integration, many still discussed work as a means to learn Norwegian, finding friends and participate in society. Studying too was important - to show up for school and make an effort to talk Norwegian with Norwegian students. To me it seemed that they acknowledged themselves as hardworking and trusting, as they did all of the things they perceived was important for integration. I interpreted this as determination, a resource when acquiring a job and learning the language through activities. All of the Somali participants talked about long periods of applying for jobs, or working short-term shifts, and thus how important it was to them that colleagues found them hard-working and motivated for shifts: *Many says: "Oh, you are always at work", I say "Yes, I just say*

*yes when I get shifts". I wouldn't say no. They say: "That is good, we will hire you when you are finished". (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

Similarly, all Somali participants (and one from Syria) mentioned how important it is to "be out there" when life seems to progress slowly; having something to do and having friends to be social with if living alone is challenging, or if job applications are slow at getting back to you: *I just spend my time hiking, and joining the Red Cross hiking group and joining... The Norwegian Tourist Foundation, and I've been in activities. And exercising on my own. (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

*If you are a person who just sits at home and such, one cannot get to know anyone. It is a little hard. But I have friends, colleagues and such, so I find a way to learn Norwegian. It is important to integrate, that is the key to opening up. (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

**5.4.3 Norms and possibilities.** As the stress of experiencing criticism from their own communities was seen as a major challenge, some participants mentioned how concentrating on the bigger picture, e.g., focusing on the possibilities of free education, The Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund ("Lånkassen") and Norwegian norms that allowed for socializing with the opposite sex, was more important than focusing on the negativity from own communities. Half of the participants mentioned freedom to choose education and possibilities for the future when discussing stress from own communities, though mostly by Syrians: *My goal I think here in Norway, when I came to Norway I have many options that I don't have in my country. So, I will not think about those people, how they talk. (Joelle, 24, Syria).*

**4.4.4 Personal strength.** During our conversations, thoughts emerged that I interpreted to be confidence, as almost every participant expressed different variations of strength from within, in response to challenges of living alone, language barriers, stress and discrimination. This final organizing theme proved to be the largest within the global theme of resources, encompassing states of powerfulness and the ability to brush off negativity, feeling secure in one's identity and having an optimistic attitude. Participants feeling confident seemed to me as a resource they possessed when everything was new and scary, representing all but one of the participants. Despite the struggles of coming to a country alone, where the culture is completely different, over time the participants felt powerful and certain that they would be fine. By continuously asking how they grew so strong and where this confidence came from, some said they always had been confident. Some said it grew by changing thoughts over time.

*I feel very good, strong and... As I have lived, only for me, doesn't work for others. I don't have to do anything for others, I think that I can do my things alone. I lived alone for a long time, so I can do many things by myself, I don't need anyone to help me. (Dareen, Syria, 22).*

*The thing I was afraid like, was more like what people would say, what people were gonna do to you, what the people would think of you. So, I just start to not think that much on that so... I'm not stressing with what the people, what they are saying. (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).*

Having a sense of own identity was also a strong finding that I understood to be a resource of personal strength, when discussing integration next to expectations from own communities, and culture clash with Norwegians. Feeling secure in who you are seemed important to participants when they participated in society, mostly in relation to the importance of wearing (or not wearing) religious clothing, but also in relation to gender expectations. All Somali participants were represented in this basic theme, and one Syrian. One participant talked about how wearing a hijab as a part of her identity did not stop the process of her integrating:

*I am a person who has an own identity, own language and... I am lucky, totally different, and... I can integrate, or I can become a part of the society without losing my identity, without losing for instance my head piece, without losing anything. (Uba, 30, Somalia).*

Fascinatingly, others talked about traditional clothing in relation to integration, but they discussed how *not* wearing a hijab was important to their identity, and not as a response to expectations: *I didn't put my hijab down to integrate with Norwegian, [it wasn't my idea you know]. It was my personal choice. (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).*

In terms of feeling equal as a woman in potential relationships, a participant from Somalia expressed confidence in her identity as a woman, when she discussed surprise from Somali men regarding getting a job and not getting married: *I said, if I get married, I have to work, and he has to work. I am not someone who just sits at home, and he goes out. We have to become equal, everyone doing things together. (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

A more balanced basic theme in terms of representing both Somali and Syrian participants, was the confidence of brushing off negative perceptions. Almost every participant did not agree with the expectations within their communities, regarding becoming too Norwegian or not following religious traditions. One participant started laughing of the thought that she as a woman, should not speak to men: *No, if anyone were to control me, I will not join that. (Joelle, 24, Syria).*

Another participant called people from her own community “The Religious People” and did not appreciate them being so strict if one did not share their opinions: *Yeah, I mean the religious*

person: “How could you be against that?”, but - he is not God or something. (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).

Also, when discussing challenges of Norwegians being skeptical to- or scared of refugees, participants shared that they did not care too much of what others thought of them, often discussing it with a laugh: *I think, maybe someone don't like me, someone do like me, I don't know. Those who don't like me, maybe they have to like themselves first?* (Joelle, 24, Syria).

A finding that emerged too when interviewing the participants, was the strength of positive thinking. A general optimism rose when they imagined their future and what life could be, even when they discussed challenges of learning the language, acquiring a job and experiencing discrimination. For instance, they generally felt that people liked them. More than half discussed how other people found them to be nice, though the context for this differed between the groups. For Somali participants, people liking them was discussed next to the struggles of getting a job. Despite having a hard time applying for jobs in the past, one participant proudly said that her colleagues liked her: *Everyone they really love me, and instead of, for instance calling a substitute, they call me.* (Uba, 30, Somalia). For Syrian participants, the thought of people liking them emerged when they discussed how Norwegians seemed skeptical towards them in the beginning, but now they felt more confident that Norwegians liked them:

*Yes, but you hear there are a lot of people who don't like us foreigners. So, you get a little scared, won't talk, maybe they don't like me, maybe that. But yes, eventually I have friends, I have Norwegian friends. They like me so much.* (Joelle, 24, Syria).

Further on, when I asked participants about their lives and how they generally felt about the integration process, the importance of enjoying life and not stressing emerged. Half of the participants, all from Somalia, showed an optimism despite talking about the struggles of getting a job and difficulties with living alone. I sensed a positive outlook for the future:

*As long as you smile, you live longer. But it is that, I like actually to have fun, I don't like sad things and stuff like that. I like to be ok and fine. When things start to get tough, I just think “it will be alright”.* (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).

## **5.5 Happiness.**

I may have indirectly touched upon the subject of happiness in previous organizing theme, by presenting findings of positive thoughts that generally appeared in the conversations. These thoughts however, seemed to be resources in response to job-related stress, language barriers and discrimination - by thinking that everything will be ok. As I

asked the participants about happiness in general (not necessarily in relation to life in Norway), in order to explore their motivation for integration, they shared different thoughts that could be seen as necessary for happiness and meaningful lives. I understood these findings to be states of both external and internal joy, as they felt good about helping others, while dreaming about future careers. By exploring how both groups experienced happiness, and whether this differed between them, I could later discuss their experience of life being meaningful, and thus how health and well-being relates to their integration process. This global theme produced 2 organizing themes: (1) External contentment and (2) Internal contentment.

**5.5.1 External contentment.** When asking them what made them happy, it seemed difficult for them to answer. They did not seem unhappy to me, it rather seemed like they were asked a question they were not prepared to receive, thus a variety of “little things” like cooking and exercise were answers most of them shared. One of them said simply being healthy made her happy. Further in the conversations however, more in-depth notions of happiness emerged when talking about life in Norway; positive emotions that seemed to be centered around a social context. Helping others for instance, by working as a personal assistant or being a friendly neighbor, was discussed by more than half of the participants. For one of them it felt good to help others through volunteering, a topic which emerged while talking about going to school. She wanted to start a volunteer group for refugees or others who struggled with school:

*Me and my friend we want to, uhm, we talk to some organizations and they will give us a place that we can meet, and me and my friend will help – will speak for those who cannot uhm, do well in school. (Khadiija, 27, Somalia).*

Socializing was also mentioned, though only half of the participants said this specifically. Meeting fellow students at school and “chilling” with friends after work was mentioned at different times of the interviews; some mentioned it when asked about happiness in Norway, and others discussed how being with friends felt nice since they lived alone. For instance, one participant initially talked about how living alone was challenging, but without being asked, she started to discuss how she loved being with her friends after work:

*When you go to work and school, and weekends I work, every other weekend I work, and that is a bit hard. When I get a day off “Oh it is so lovely, I have to find my friends, go to [city anonymized], drink coffee”. So much is happening when I am off. (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).*

All participants from Somalia mentioned that they felt good when they contributed to the society in terms of working. They expressed how having a job made them feel well by

being a good colleague, and it felt nice not having to just sit at home. One of them talked about feeling good by giving back to the society: *I don't feel bad at all, I feel good no matter what, and I am so happy that I have become a part of the society, who pays taxes and work, and help people that need it.* (Uba, 30, Somalia).

**5.5.2 Internal contentment.** Similar to organizing themes presented earlier, findings here gradually appeared in relation to other topics we discussed, such as challenges and resources, but also just life in general. I interpreted the findings of this basic theme to be of internal states, as participants dreamed about certain careers, and shared feelings of independence. Despite themes representing stress from own communities, discrimination and frustration regarding lost education in their homeland, dreams and excitement rose as they started to talk about careers they wanted to achieve. This was a topic that emerged when talking about motivation for integration. Feeling happy by having dreams for the future turned out to be a basic theme involving every participant. This participant talked about wanting to become a midwife despite the long process of education:

*I will apply for an apprenticeship, after I finish health work studies. I want to be a midwife, actually. Yes, it is a long way but that is ok. One has to fulfill your dream.* (Shamshi, 26, Somalia).

Though only described by two participants, both groups were represented when the topic of independence emerged, while discussing stress from own communities and discrimination from Norwegians, but also regarding the future and motivation for integration. One participant laughed and stressed how working and feeling independent was important to her, if people think negatively of her: *“Ok, what do you do”?* - *I work and get by on my own, and I am very happy I can make it on my own, actually.* (Uba, 30, Somalia).

## **Chapter Six: Discussion.**

### **6.1 Introduction.**

My aim through this research process has been to explore how unaccompanied refugee women from Somalia and Syria experience integration when resettling in Norway, and how this affects their well-being. Findings revealed differences between the groups, mostly regarding challenges during the integration process. Here I discuss implications of the most prominent themes that emerged, and later how this may affect their well-being in light of the components of Salutogenesis. Limitations I found this study to have will be presented at the end of this chapter.

**6.2 Integration means to speak the language.** Findings indicate that participants from both Somalia and Syria have similar views regarding perceptions of integration – speaking the language in order to engage with people, study and work were narratives shared by more than half of the participants. In general, how refugees experience integration, and specifically how language is related to this, is little researched and seemingly overshadowed by studies exploring the negative mental health consequences of resettling. This is supported by Tip, Brown, Morrice, Collyer and Easterbrook (2019) and Cheung & Phillimore (2014), who explored language proficiency, social capital and labor market integration of refugees resettled in the UK. By addressing the gap of knowledge regarding language proficiency and integration, Tip et al. (2019) found that mastering the language of the host country made communication and employment possible; language was pivotal for living independently. Similarly, in addition to finding language proficiency to be a source for expanding one's social network, Cheung and Phillimore (2014) found refugees to rate the importance of learning the language even higher than what policy makers and researchers did. It is argued that bonding with locals through language is positively linked with well-being through formation of cross-culture friendships that reduce anxiety and isolation (Tip et al., 2019). Consequences of poor language skills were highlighted by Phillimore's (2011) study, where refugees in the UK felt incapable of creating relationships with locals and thus felt isolated when they were unable to speak English. As participants in this study perceived language to be pivotal for integration, and literature argues how language proficiency positively affects well-being, it is alarming (and perhaps ironic) that many studies stress the association between refugees and mental health disorders, but do not explore the relationship between well-being and the quality of language classes. The challenge of not knowing the language well is perhaps expected when one resettles in a new country, but the theme of participants finding language classes inadequate was more surprising. More than half of this study's participants, representing both groups equally, seemed motivated to become a member of the Norwegian society as they discussed the importance of learning language. However, learning Norwegian through language classes did not seem successful according to the participants, as methods such as watching an American movie with Norwegian subtitles, or being in class with people who had different learning capabilities, were perceived to be ineffective. Experiencing language barriers in terms of not being able to understand, is a challenge often highlighted by literature (Fang et al., 2015; Gericke et al., 2018), while inadequate language classes are rarely specified as type of barrier. Literature argue that isolation is a potential

implication of language barriers, but fortunately it seems that most of my participants do not experience this, which will be discussed later.

**6.3 Different sources of frustration.** A surprising difference emerged between the Somali and Syrian participants, regarding job-related stress and frustration related to lost education. Most of the Somali participants expressed frustration regarding difficulties finding a job. One of them said (though she has multiple jobs at current time), that she had applied for a thousand jobs, and another participant said experience and volunteering did not seem enough for getting a job. Like Kuittinen et al. (2014) mentioned, the unemployment rate among Somali refugees is traditionally high, but most studies refer to statistics and not to reasons for why this is so. In Warfa, Curtis, Watters, Carswell, Ingleby and Bhui's study (2012), male and female Somali refugees in England and USA felt a lack of recognition of their professional- and language skills, and one of the participants wondered if having a foreign name scared potential employers, which is also similar to what one of my participants speculated. Unemployment has amongst other factors, been argued to be a reason for psychiatric disorders and poor well-being (Warfa et al., 2012). Renner and Senft (2013) argued that refugee women in particular are prone to social isolation in relation to unemployment, due to being frequently denied access to the labor market in their home countries. Issues such as PTSD was also argued to be enhanced by unemployment (Renner & Senft, 2013). Positive consequences from obtaining employment are argued to be reduction on welfare dependency and improvement of well-being (Gericke et al, 2018). According to Putzi-Ortiz (2008), Somali culture is male-dominant, and thus educated Somali women in Somalia are deprived of work opportunities due to discrimination. Poverty is argued to affect the education of Somali girls, as literacy rate of Somali women was 26% in 2008. The author stated that most Somali girls drop out after primary education. Education for Syrian women is free through university, and Putzi-Ortiz (2008) argue that Syrian women with degrees in law, medicine and engineering find employment at same rates as men. In this study, most Somali participants had the perception that Syrian refugees in Norway had it easier regarding employment, due to experience and learning the language faster. Interestingly, Syrian participants did not discuss job-related stress, but frustration regarding education they had to retake, as a majority had started their education - and some already had degrees from home. These findings and literature could possibly explain why there exists more studies regarding Syrian refugees and the labor market (Çetin 2016; Okenwa-Emegwa et al., 2017; Bucken-Knapp et al., 2018; Hanley et al., 2018; Knappert et al., 2018; Şimsek, 2018), than studies of

the same topic concerning Somali refugees. Perhaps it is more expected that Syrian refugees will integrate through the labor market, more so than the Somalis? One of the Somali participants even said she could not relate to the older generation in her community, because they did not want to work in environments where there was alcohol, like restaurants. It is nevertheless conducted too little research, especially in Norway, to conclude why my participants experience such different sources of frustration, and perhaps the Syrian refugees have not been here long enough to experience the same situation of applying for work? Whether or not my Somali participants experience social isolation, welfare dependency and poor well-being is yet to be discussed.

**6.4 Culture clash.** As already discussed, the participants found language proficiency as a means to work and engage in social gatherings. Despite finding some Norwegians helpful in terms of language practice and clarification of words, both groups experienced what seems to be a culture clash with Norwegians, in terms of finding their personality cold and reserved. All but one participant found local Norwegians to be keeping to themselves. The participant who is not represented in this finding has been in Norway the shortest amount of time amongst all participants, and thus the others might have developed a more shared perception of locals for their time being here. Their notions were that it was hard to get to know Norwegians - it was not enough to simply expect Norwegians to come up to them and make friends. Both Somali and Syrian participants also had the impression that Norwegians were scared of strangers and religion. It is suggested that locals can perceive refugees as a disruption of ethnic balance, and have ties with rebel groups, which contribute to a sense of insecurity, and that their presence may lead to economic competition regarding jobs and welfare (Getmansky, Sinmazdemir & Zeitzoff, 2018). Ghosn, Braithwaite and Chu (2018) found similarities when analyzing literature of public attitudes toward hosting refugees; though attitudes tend to be more sympathetic if referred to as “refugees” than “immigrants”, attitudes concerned burdens on welfare provision and threats to security. Bye, Hjetland, Røyset and Westby (2014) asked a random sample in Norway to list groups they meant existed in Norway. Though only 10% listed “Norwegians” to be a group on its own, compared to “Muslims” (40%) and “immigrants” (37,5%), respondents were asked to what extent they considered Norwegians to be competent and skillful, friendly and warm. “Norwegians” were seen as more competent than warm. “Muslims” and “immigrants” scored below midpoint and were thus perceived as moderate warm and competent (these groups had similar scores as the groups “unemployed” and “welfare recipients”). This might indicate that groups such as

immigrants and Muslims are on the margins of the Norwegian society. It is important to stress that the sample in Bye et al.'s (2014) study were only 40 Norwegian-born people, with the exception of two who had immigrant parents, and it is not possible in this study to conclude whether the Norwegians that my participants found reserved, actually had attitudes toward refugees similar to Bye et al.'s (2014) findings. Nevertheless, it is argued that a sense of belonging and social support can be a protective factor against psychological distress (Kuittinen et al., 2014). As the majority of the participants mentioned that they had Norwegian friends who also helped them with struggles such as language, housing or learning how to drive, it seems as if their social network did include Norwegians after a while. This could indicate that one of my findings - the importance of making an effort when it comes to learning the language and making friends, is highly necessary if the Norwegian stereotype is less warm, to prevent psychological distress.

**6.5 Somali discrimination.** Groups in a society that are stereotyped as low in both “warmth” and “competence” tend to face discrimination such as harassment and neglect according to Bye et al. (2014). Somali participants experienced both verbal and physical discrimination, such as receiving questions from drunk people regarding reasons for being here and whether they were Muslims. One of the participant's experienced people asking her if she was a recipient of welfare from NAV, and if her boyfriend had bought her so she could have a better life here in Norway. Though not from a Norwegian, she also experienced being followed by the saleswoman in a store, getting the feeling that the woman was suspicious of her stealing. Another of the Somali participants experienced being spit on by a white man she perceived to be Norwegian. Name-calling and negative media attention seem to be common types of discrimination, found in for instance Fang et al.'s (2015) study. According to Bye et al. (2014), a realistic assumption is that perceptions of Somalis in Norway are shaped by negative media coverage, as they have received media attention such as being the poorest outcome across statistics, facing high reliance on welfare and having a high unemployment rate. According to Tharmalingam (2013), Norwegian media has since the 1990s also reported cases such as forced marriages among minorities in the society, and the author suggests that cultural practices of minorities that contradict Norwegian values, such as gender equality, are often linked to social problems. It is suggested that it exists an ethnic hierarchy in the Norwegian society, with Somali immigrants at the bottom (Bye et al., 2014); by comparing groups such as “Swedes” and “Polish” with “Somalis”, Swedes were rated as both competent and warm, while Polish immigrants scored more competent and skillful than warm – Somalis

were rated as both low on warmth and competence (sharing similar results as “drug addicts”). Two of the Somali participants in this study discussed how Norwegians and the media highlight poor employment rate among Somali refugees, and they perceived Norwegians as wanting refugees to assimilate rather than integrate (to be explained further down), so it is reasonable to argue that my participants are aware of these attitudes. Implications of this could be poor mental health. A central finding in Ellis, MacDonald, Klunk-Gillis, Lincoln, Strunin and Cabral’s (2010) study of discrimination among Somali youth refugees, was that participants who experienced discrimination attributed to ethnicity and religion, displayed higher levels of depression symptoms. Resilience to discrimination is by the authors suggested to be linked with acculturation – understood as the process of personal changes due to the extent of how much one identifies with one’s culture of origin and the culture of the host country. Ellis et al. (2010) suggest that maintaining a strong connection with culture of origin may protect refugees from negative effects of discrimination, as refugees in their study who participated in Somali communities- and activities, showed better mental health. However, group and community identification are argued to be protective only when they satisfy needs of belonging (Alemi & Stempel, 2018). For instance, Celebi, Verkuyten and Bagci (2017) found when exploring health among *Syrian* refugees, that ethnic discrimination was indeed associated with poor mental health - but a sense of continuity, meaningfulness and sense of control from their Syrian identification was linked to lower levels of depression. Another buffer for better mental health is suggested to be found in variations of acculturation by Sam and Berry (2010), who argue that one adapts better in terms of sociocultural competence and mental well-being through “integration” - when one is engaged in both host- and heritage culture, in contrast to positioning one-self to one or the other side through “assimilation” - by adopting norms and attitudes of only one of the cultures (or to neither cultures through “marginalization”).

**6.6 Stress from communities.** While the findings of discrimination were mainly applicable to the Somali participants, every single participant in this study experienced being a woman as challenging, due to expectations from their cultural communities regarding how women should behave. Most of the Somali participants in addition, experienced that communities had certain expectations of them regarding values. Half of the participants, with the majority being Somalis, expressed that they might get scolded at by their community if they spend too much time with Norwegians and thus lost one’s culture. One of them said she in fact had a problem with her community, because she felt people were not friendly towards

each other there. She further expressed that if she was considered different – she was a problem. Being different meant drinking alcohol, or not wearing a hijab. This notion was shared by one of the Syrian participants, who also said she had a problem with people from her home country; she felt that people from her community did not like her due to her being outgoing, drinking alcohol, and not wearing a hijab. She was upset that the Syrian network did not like her, and she expressed that they would talk badly about her behind her back. In Lenette et al.'s (2012) study of single refugee women (with children) who experienced community suspicion that affected their well-being, she found that while communities were a source of support, it was also a source of distress and isolation; some sensed that their community assumed they were “running after” other's men, if they communicated with married men. Long working hours and their children's schooling was also gossiped about. Lenette et al. (2012) found that not paying attention to disapproval, having a job and a strong sense of determination to achieve goals, helped reduce isolation brought on by this scrutiny. Again, there is little research on unaccompanied adult women, and Lenette et al.'s (2012) study is centered around refugee women with children. There seems to be a lack of research on the relationship between refugees and their own communities, not only regarding values but also gender inequality. During our conversations, it emerged that some participants from Syria felt that their communities considered women to feel emotions more intensely than men, and thus having more mental- or “emotional” problems. This may indicate that many within cultural communities have the perception that mental health problems are a “female issues”. Though not specifically related to mental health, one of the Somali participants said that many in her culture did not accept that women participated in the society, in terms of having a job. Somali participants also stressed that talking to men was considered bad, and one would be considered a bad influence if one was not honest, honorable and respectful of parents. Another of the Somali participants meant that this was also the case for Syrian refugee women, as she had experienced prejudice on behalf of a Syrian woman in a refugee camp before coming to Norway. She stated that Syrian men were talking about this girl in a bad way because she had arrived alone; despite this Somali participant having arrived to the camp alone herself, she experienced others being more hard on the Syrian girl - by calling her a whore due to not being married. Though Fisher (2013) explored the relationship between gender roles in communities and domestic violence in Australia, she argued that Western ideologies in contrast to collective structures found in (amongst other countries) Somalia, create tension within resettled communities. Adapting to Australian values regarding domestic violence was challenging for community members, and perhaps expectations communities

possess regarding gender roles seen in *this* study, are similarly difficult to adjust within the Norwegian ideology of gender equality? There is a huge gap regarding studies of unaccompanied refugee women, and this applies to the issue of gender inequality within communities as well. Implications are therefore hard to discuss. It seems however that the theme of personal strength my participants demonstrate, can prove to be a means of distancing themselves from conflicting values, which will be discussed further down.

## **6.7 Formation of SOC.**

It is suggested that general resistance resources (GRRs) help form a strong Sense of Coherence (SOC) (a sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) which makes it possible to cope better with challenges (Eriksson, 2017). By exploring the experience and challenges of the participant's integration process above, it is now possible to distinguish the resistance resources that help form their SOC.

**6.7.1 Comprehensibility.** Comprehensibility is described as a cognitive component, that affects one's level of confidence that stimuli arising from one's internal and external environment are clear and predictable (Lindström & Eriksson, 2006). It is argued that this component is formed by experiencing consistent responses in a stable environment, characterized by recurring messages to similar situations (Slootjes, Keuzenkamo & Saharso, 2017). Participants in this study shared experiences of starting a new life as daunting, with new norms to comprehend and a new language to learn. Some of them were first settled in the Northern part of Norway, seeing snow for the first time, but ended up moving again to a larger city farther south. Others were settled in smaller places on the West coast. All participants found living alone scary, as most of them were used to living with large families, and some of them had never cooked a meal by themselves before. It seemed however, that this fearfulness of a new life gradually decreased when they grasped norms and language. It did not seem like they found it surprising that learning a language takes time, but they did express both frustration and surprise regarding methods taught in language classes. In addition, meeting the "reserved" personality of Norwegians did seem to be a huge difference from social norms in both Somalia and Syria, as both groups discussed how reserved Norwegians were difficult to befriend. Nevertheless, a culture clash like this does not really change; it seemed like participants had gotten used to this personality trait and stated how volunteering and showing up for "dugnad" was necessary when befriending Norwegians. Thus far, findings can indicate that the "comprehensibility competent" of both group's SOC,

is helped shaped by an understanding of language being a time-consuming task, as well as cultural norms are stable factors one gradually grows accustomed to.

Unfortunately, it seems that consistent stimuli that form comprehensibility of what it means to integrate into the Norwegian society, also involves stress and discrimination. Both groups experienced discrimination from their cultural communities, and though it seemed that all of them were surprised by this in the beginning (some of them said they were upset that they felt disliked), gradually all of them stopped spending time with their communities. However stressful, criticism of behavior and expectations of gender roles seem to be consistent stimuli from these communities, as both groups discussed similar experiences, and literature (however dearth) seemingly support my findings. Discrimination in terms of verbal and physical judgement was experienced more harshly by the Somali participants from the Norwegian society, and some of them seemed shocked by their perception of Norwegian media wanting them to assimilate more so than integrate. As Literature indicate that refugees often experience discrimination (Fang et al., 2015), and Somali refugees seem to be particularly vulnerable for negative attitudes in Norway (Tharmalingam, 2013; Bye et al., 2014), this seem also to be consistent stimulus in their environment.

Noteworthy differences between the groups however, were job-related stress and frustration related to lost education. The majority of the Somali participants discussed how experience and motivation was not enough to get a job, and they were not sure whether their foreign name or CV (or if others, such as Syrians could handle jobs better than them) hindered them from getting a job. Obtaining employment was a desire for participants from both groups, and most of the Syrian participants had started their higher degrees in Syria before resettling in Norway. Frustration and surprise regarding having to start upper secondary school all over again in Norway was evident for the majority of the Syrian participants. Though one of the Somali participants stated that it was difficult for everyone, (including Norwegians) to get a job, the participants' surprise regarding job-related stress could indicate a discrepancy between expectations of how language proficiency and skills could lead to employment. According to Sloop et al. (2017), a relatively weak SOC is characterized by having a discrepancy between expectations and experiences, in relation to work and education. Being well educated and ambitious, yet feeling disappointed when education and work-experience seem worthless during resettlement, is argued to threaten both consistency and manageability, as well as meaningfulness. The Syrian participants however, found education valuable and did not reveal any plans of ending their education progress despite

feeling frustrated. Hence, a weak SOC does not seem to be the case for the Syrians as they seem to accept that education is time-consuming, in addition to growing accustomed to cultural norms, community stress and onerous language learning. The comprehensibility component for the Somali participants however, might I argue thus far to be weak; despite acknowledging hard work while experiencing consistent stimuli of discrimination, being rejected during work search when one has the perception of employment being important for integration, might be a discrepancy which indicates a weak comprehensibility of the integration process, as employment rejection could be seen as inconsistent stimuli.

**6.7.2 Manageability.** The component of manageability is understood as a behavioral element, in terms of having the ability to identify resources available to face demands posed by stimuli (Eriksson, 2017). Learning the language has throughout this study proved to be their key perception of what it means to integrate; equally representing both groups - participants mentioned different networks and organizations that helped them when needing additional support with language practice, as language classes were not sufficient. Some mentioned that Norwegian neighbors and colleagues helped them with clarification of words, and two of the participants used activities that allowed them to practice Norwegian with others through the Red Cross and the public library. One of the Somali participants had a boyfriend that corrected her grammar when studying Norwegian. Findings thus indicate that both groups identified networks of personal friends and boyfriends, as well as “outer circle”-networks such as non-governmental organizations and professionals like doctors or teachers, if they needed more help to learn language. GRRs are argued to be the cornerstone of the formation of SOC. Networks discussed here can be argued to be an example of psychosocial resistance resources (Eriksson, 2017), and thus interpersonal characteristics that help avoid distress.

Also, one of the most profound findings that emerged in this study was that participants understood that learning language takes time and effort through determination. Integration was perceived to be an effort in itself, by being open and curious while pushing through anxiety when everything was new. For instance, one of the Syrian refugees perceived her own language level as insufficient, but she used body language to express herself and made an effort to talk to others. Determination also seemed to be a resource in terms of making friends, when experiencing Norwegians as reserved and cold. The participants discussed how hard it was to get to know Norwegians, and implications for not bonding with locals have been argued to cause isolation (Phillimore, 2011). While gradually growing

familiar with the reserved personality trait of Norwegians, it seems that participants made use of their ability to be open and curious, and participated in activities like the very Norwegian thing “dugnad”. Many also talked about being hard-working and busy with either school or work (or both), and it seemed that these environments were places they made friends (both Norwegians and from other cultures). One of the Syrian participants said she did not have much free time anymore, because she went to school and went out with friends. A Somali participant said it was hard in the beginning, but now too she did not really have much free time, as she was working and going to school.

Findings thus far, indicate that identifying interpersonal resources such as different networks for support, are tools to manage language- and social barriers, while also acknowledging that learning language is hard work that requires effort and determination. In addition, actively choosing to stay positive and strengthening the feeling of independence by having goals, seem like internal resources both groups used when coping with community scrutiny. Not paying attention to what community members expected, emerged in our discussions, as many of them did not agree with the criticism from communities and laughed when acknowledging that while some people might accept them, others would be upset if they saw them drinking alcohol or choosing to not wear hijabs. One of the Syrian participants said she would just have to accept that others did not like her, but she would not change into something others wanted her to be. A Somali participant stressed that she would not pay attention to values that did not suit her. Both Somali and Syrian participants discussed how many from their communities did not accept that women had jobs, and therefore stressed that if they were to get married someday, they would still want to work. Similar to Lenette et al.’s (2012) findings, all of my participants wanted to study and get a job, and many of them had specific career goals that required higher education. This could indicate that having a strong sense of determination to achieve goals, and the ability to look away from negativity reduce isolation and distress. The manageability component is also argued to be shaped by good load balance (Slootjes et al., 2017) by not experiencing higher demands than what an individual can meet, while at the same time not experiencing “underload” when too little is required. As underload is argued to cause disinterest and demotivation (Slootjes et al., 2017), inner determination by actively applying for jobs while volunteering, might prove to prevent demotivation for the Somali Participants, who seem to experience an appropriate load balance which makes it possible to handle job-related stress. As comprehensibility was argued to be weak earlier, due to discrepancy between job-expectations and rejections, it is here argued

that manageability through appropriate load-balance compensate for a weak comprehensibility for the Somali participants. Therefore, I find their SOC thus far well shaped.

In relation to frustration over lost and prolonged education, the opportunity to both study and work through introduction programs and “Lånekassen”, seemed like a means to enhance independence and not only escape scrutiny from communities, but also prevent demotivation regarding education. Two of the Syrians discussed possibilities they did not have at home. As education seems to be more accessible for Syrian women in their homeland than Somalis (at least before the war) (Putzi-Ortiz, 2008), this could indicate how much the war affects civilians - as mostly the Syrian participants discussed possibilities Norway, in contrast to only one Somali. In addition to education - norms and customs in Norway offered participants more freedom to be social and, in their own words, happy. One of the Syrians said that next to feeling safe and having friends, opportunities like studying and teaching her child to later be successful in college made her feel happy. She stressed that she would not think about what people (e.g. her community) said about her, because when she came to Norway, she had more opportunities than she had in Syria. She admired that everyone in Norway gets to choose who they want to be and what they want to study, and stressed that this is important for an individual. Similarly, the Somali participant discussed how she could decide for herself in Norway, regarding whom to talk to. For instance, she acknowledged that she had spoken to a man that day, which would have been different in Somalia, where she would not have been around men that much. Thus, being able to acknowledge opportunities in Norway - to study through both Introduction programs and Lånekassen, in addition to desire work, these factors seem like instrumental mechanisms that strengthens their SOC. This is supported by Sloop et al.’s (2017) findings, who found that their participants who had a strong SOC were protected from dependence on others through the host-country’s resources, which in turn protected their sense of consistency, manageability and meaningfulness. Lindström and Eriksson’s (2011) drawing “Health in the River of Life” (Figure 1), demonstrating health as the responsible of both individual *and* the public, could be seen as supported by these findings.

My participants thus seem to identify psychosocial resistance resources such as networks and opportunities in the Norwegian society, but also internal resources such as determination and having a positive outlook; cognitive characteristics of an individual that are

effective when battling personal distress (Eriksson, 2017). The manageability component of SOC is therefore argued to be strong for my participants.

**6.7.3 Meaningfulness.** This final component behind SOC is understood as a motivational dimension, where one finds demands of life worthy of investment (Eriksson, 2017). Throughout this study, it has been evident that knowing the Norwegian language allowed participants to be social and have the possibility to work and participate. Van der Slik, Van Hout and Schepens (2015) argue that language proficiency seems to be a genetically influenced ability that interacts with the factor of motivation. Asfar, Born, Oostrom and van Vugt (2019) explored psychological predictors of language acquisition among Syrian and Eritrean refugees in the Netherlands, and found work motivation to be important; language proficiency was positively associated with work search intention. This may in fact support this study's findings, as all of them were enrolled in education while either having or applying for work - and most of the participants spoke Norwegian fluently. Participants expressed similar notions like this Somali participant, who expressed that she feels a part of the society because she wants to study, work and pay taxes. She further stated that managing on her own was important to her, when discussing how people in the Norwegian society claimed her for only being a social welfare-recipient. This was similar to another Somali participant, who acknowledged that having a job was far better than doing nothing – social welfare would not even be enough for her. All participants had the desire to continue studies and find a job afterwards, and thus shaping their lives through education and work seemed highly meaningful to them, probably because it was a desire within themselves, but perhaps also because it enhanced the opportunity to distance themselves from community stress and ethnicity discrimination. Antonovsky argued that a higher job status which allows for autonomy and decision making, has been linked with a stronger SOC (Antonovsky, 1987 in Slootjes et al., 2017, pp.572-573).

The participant's experience of integration as language proficiency, being social and having a job, seems thus not only challenging but equally meaningful. Inner determination discussed earlier through a behavioral component – which functions as a tool to handle language barriers and job-related stress, seems together with the motivational component to be a mutual mechanism behind their SOC. It has also been argued that a strong sense of identity can help reduce mental health issues linked with discrimination attributed to ethnicity. Most of the Somali participants experienced discrimination by the Norwegian society, as they told stories of being accused of stealing and only being in Norway for social welfare. Ellis et

al. (2010) suggested that a connection with culture of origin and participation in cultural activities, may protect refugees from poor mental health due to discrimination. This is not related to my findings as my participants distanced themselves from their communities. However, the argument of how a strong sense of identity in terms of feeling control and meaningfulness from cultural identification can prevent depression, as suggested by Çelebi et al. (2017), might be more related to my findings. The Somali participants did express a strong sense of identity, demonstrated by one of them saying she had her own identity by wearing a hijab and knowing both languages, while at the same time having a Norwegian boyfriend and a job. She said she could integrate without losing her culture. Another Somali who enjoyed going out with friends, and occasionally drank alcohol, said she felt she could have both Somali and Norwegian culture, and stressed that *not* wearing a hijab was a personal choice. According to Antonovsky, the component of meaningfulness is enhanced through decision making, in terms of feeling heard and being able to shape outcomes (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 572 in Sloopjes et al, 2017). Despite experiencing negative attitudes towards their ethnicity, choosing aspects from both cultures that fit their identity can be seen as both an active and meaningful decision, that makes their integration process not only manageable, but worthy of time and effort. It also may indicate that the Somali participants are integrating more so than “assimilating”, which is argued to be linked with well-being (Sam & Berry, 2010). A strong sense of identity and the ability to shape outcomes, seem in addition to language learning, education and work-search, as aspects involved in their integration process that strengthens the component of meaningfulness.

By discussing findings in view of literature and Salutogenesis, I argue that participants encompass a strong sense of coherence. As Antonovsky (1996) suggested Salutogenesis to be a theoretical basis for health promotion, I will next discuss these findings in light of health promotion and Antonovsky’s (1996) suggestion.

## **6.8 Findings in relation to health promotion.**

By utilizing the framework of Salutogenesis in this thesis, central issues at the moment of global development have been highlighted, as it is argued that 29.5 million refugees are fleeing their homes (UNHCR, 2019) and 4,4 % of the Norwegian population are refugees resettling (Strøm, 2019). The concept of SOC is argued to be similar to the definition of health promotion (Lindström & Eriksson, 2011), and the illustration of “Health in the River of Life” (Lindström & Eriksson (2011) (Figure 1), demonstrates the similarity by acknowledging active participation of swimming through challenges towards well-being. I

argue that my findings regarding challenges, highlight the importance of identifying resources to enhance well-being - an essential part of the definition of health promotion, of which emphasizes the individual's ability to use resources to satisfy needs and improve quality of life. Salutogenesis has allowed me to explore through a resource-based approach, resistance resources that may help unaccompanied refugees in Norway cope with challenges when integrating, so they can swim in the river of life and thus gain control over- and improve their well-being. Salutogenesis is therefore seen as valuable theory for identifying resources necessary for health promotion, and I thus find Antonovsky's (1996) suggestion for his framework to be a theoretical guide for health promotion, as a valid proposal.

## **6.9 Limitations**

A qualitative approach was used in this study, with the method of interviewing to gather data. As most of my participants lived outside of Bergen, interviews through phone- and Facebook calls are seen as a limitation that may threaten quality, as the data would probably be considered more in-depth if I had managed to interpret body-language in addition to the words they expressed. Their missed opportunity to see my face as well, could also jeopardize trust and rapport gained from my participants. One of the conversations through a Facebook-call was also of bad quality, as the audio disappeared on several occasions which could threaten credibility. It is also important to acknowledge that allowing participants to speak English, and not only Norwegian fluently, may cause misinterpretation when translating Norwegian into English transcriptions. Ideally, I would have made use of a translator that spoke Somali and Arabic, but as this is a 30-credit thesis, time limitations and lack of resources did not allow it.

I also aimed for my participants to have arrived unaccompanied, but two of my participants arrived with a child and a sister. If all participants had arrived by themselves, findings would be a more appropriate tool for discussing the topic of refugee women arriving completely alone.

It is perhaps an additional limitation that I did not focus on their life experiences prior to resettling in Norway, as fleeing from Somalia and Syria are experiences that must differ in more than one way, and may therefore affect their experience of integration after arriving. Comparing their experiences of integration, was however the main focus, but it would have been valuable information to know their prior history. Again, as this is a 30-credit thesis, time did not allow it.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1. Conclusion.

**Their experience of integration.** Throughout this thesis I have explored how unaccompanied female refugees from Somalia and Syria experience their integration process and the challenges associated with it, but just as important - how they identify and use resistance resources that affect their well-being. Both groups understood language proficiency as key to integration, which opened up to education, work possibilities and social gatherings. This was experienced as time consuming, while cultural norms such as “the reserved Norwegian” and scrutiny from their own communities, were shared challenges for both groups.

**Their Sense of Coherence.** Language barriers, culture clash and community stress were comprehended and managed through hard-work and positivity, in addition to having goals of education and work. Almost every participant seemed to draw upon an inner self-esteem in response to the expectations they felt from communities regarding drinking alcohol and spending time with Norwegians, which seems to reduce isolation and distress as most of my participants specifically expressed that they felt strong and well. Work-related stress however, and frustration over lost or prolonged education, were challenges that differed for the groups. Self-esteem and determination seemed especially evident for the Somali participants, when they discussed how getting a job had been difficult. It seemed to me that all Somali participants considered themselves as hard-working and determined to get a job. One of them positively acknowledged her effort of applying for thousands of jobs, and said she had been working as a volunteer in the past, and at current time she had multiple jobs. Another Somali would always reply «yes» when being asked to do a shift at her current job, because she was eager to be hired full time eventually. Appropriate load balance by actively applying for jobs and volunteering, as well as acknowledging how obtaining work is difficult for *everyone* in the society, compensated for a weak comprehensibility of the integration process for the Somali participants.

Employment was a meaningful aspect for both groups that made language learning worthy of effort. In addition, it seems that a strong sense of identity for the Somalis, helped prevent distress caused by discrimination, through integration in contrast to assimilation. The ability to identify opportunities offered by the Norwegian society was a meaningful aspect

especially evident for the Syrian participants, despite feeling frustrated over prolonged education.

**Experience of integration and their well-being.** It has throughout this thesis been argued by many, that isolation and dependence on welfare, as well as psychiatric disorders such as anxiety and PTSD, are implications of different integration challenges discussed here. These implications however, do not seem applicable to my participants. Somali and Syrian refugee women arriving alone seem to be protected by their ability to cope with challenges that follow an integration process, by GRRs discussed in this study that I argue shape a strong SOC within my participants. Though some of the challenges differed between the groups, a majority of the resistance resources they used were similar, and thus the idea of SOC being universal across culture, can be supported by my findings. My participants seem to have comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness regarding their integration process, and therefore their well-being seems to be affected in such a way, that that their ability to control and improve quality of life seems to be intact.

## **7.2. Recommendations.**

- Health was demonstrated by Lindström and Eriksson (2011) as the responsibility of both the individual and the public. As participants identified education and NGOs as a resources, in addition to using own personal strengths, this illustrates how well-being truly is a shared responsibility. Norwegian politicians seemingly stress employment to strengthen language proficiency, but I recommend instead turning the focus to strengthening the measures of language learning - in order to enhance the possibilities for employment. It is suggested in this thesis, that creating more effective environments for language learning by exploring different methods used in public libraries and NGO's, is highly recommended, as participants found learning and practicing language more effective through other settings than the introduction programs. As literature argues language proficiency to positively affect well-being and social networks, this would not only enhance refugee's language skills and employment possibilities, but also their well-being.
- Better knowledge of a possible generation gap between young refugees resettling in a host country, and elder refugees more connected to cultural communities, is recommended as this relationship seemingly causes stress for the younger ones when they integrate. How the older refugee generation experience integration in

relation to their cultural community, would be valuable information in order to create supportive environments for better integration.

- It is also here suggested that future researchers conduct studies on Syrian refugee's perception of work opportunities, as it would be valuable information whether job-related stress, such as difficulties getting a job despite relevant experience, is due to prejudice regarding ethnicity or a lack of jobs in the society in general. As job-related stress was a challenge that Somali participants experienced, it would be beneficial to explore whether Syrian refugees will experience similar challenges when they have settled for a longer amount of time, as they are currently the largest refugee group in Norway. Exploring more in-depth how different refugee groups experience job-related challenges, would highlight potential differences in our society, that in turn affect individual's sense of belonging and well-being.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Form of Consent (English version).**

#### **Request for participation in research project.**

##### **Purpose of research project.**

My name is Elena Davanger and I am a Master's degree student at University of Bergen. I study Global Development in the Department of Health Promotion and Development.

For my Master's thesis, I am to conduct a research project on the experience of integration by unaccompanied women from Somalia and Syria who came to Norway as refugees. The purpose of this project is to learn how unaccompanied refugees from Somalia and Syria experience integration processes in Norway; to explore whether these experiences differ and how these experiences affect refugees' well-being (e.g., the feeling of being healthy and happy). It is an area of interest because integration is rarely linked to well-being, and it is therefore important to learn about similarities and differences among refugee groups, for better appreciation of health and integration processes.

You have been asked to take part in this interview because you meet the following criteria:

- You arrived as a refugee or asylum seeker in Norway unaccompanied by family members or spouse.
- You are 18 years or older.
- You speak English or/and Norwegian.
- You are familiar with introduction courses in Norway, either by having completed them or are currently enrolled in them.

##### **What does participation imply?**

You have been asked to take part in an interview which will last between 30 minutes to 1 hour maximum. You will be asked about your experiences regarding challenges and resources you have faced when settling in Norway. I will record the interview in order to analyze the responses during spring 2019, the latest by June 2019.

##### **What will happen to the responses you give?**

Responses you give will only be used for my research project, and not shared with anyone who is not directly involved in this study (being myself and my supervisor Marguerite Daniel, Associate Professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Development at University of Bergen). Your responses will be anonymous, and your personal data (your name and possible connections you might have to an organization or institution) will be treated confidentially – meaning, your responses and your name will be stored on a laptop to which only I have a password, and names will be anonymized. Analysis of your answers will be finished by June 2019; however, the audio recording of your interview will be deleted as soon as I have transcribed the interview (two weeks after our interview date). You will not be identifiable in my thesis.

### **Your rights**

Regarding your personal data, you have the right to:

- Request access to your personal data,
- Request correction, deletion or limitation of your personal data,
- Receive a copy of your personal data,
- Send a complaint to Personvernforbundet/Data protection Officer regarding the treatment of your personal data.

This study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data).

### **What gives me the right to treat your personal data?**

I will only treat your personal information if you give me your consent.

### **Voluntary participation.**

Your choice of participating in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw your consent at any time without stating reasons for doing so. If you choose to withdraw, all off your responses and personal data will be deleted.

### **Findings from research project.**

You may have a copy of my thesis after it has been submitted.

### **Contact information.**

Please contact me if you have any questions: [elena.davanger@student.uib.no](mailto:elena.davanger@student.uib.no), or by phone +47 92637538.

Feel free to also contact:

The University of Bergen, Marguerite Daniel: [marguerite.daniel@uib.no](mailto:marguerite.daniel@uib.no) / +47 55 58 32 20

NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS: [personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no) / 55 58 21 17.

**Kind regards,**

Elena Davanger.

## **Appendix 2: Form of Consent (Norwegian version).**

### **Forespørsel om å delta i forskningsprosjekt.**

#### **Hensikt med forskningsprosjektet.**

Mitt navn er Elena Davanger, og jeg er masterstudent på Universitetet i Bergen. Jeg studerer Global Development på psykologisk fakultet, ved avdelingen Health Promotion and Development.

I min masteroppgave skal jeg utføre et forskningsprosjekt ang. opplevelsen av integrering som enslige kvinner fra Somalia og Syria har. Hensikten med dette prosjektet er å lære hvordan enslige flyktninger fra Somalia og Syria opplever integreringsprosessen i Norge; å utforske om disse opplevelsene er ulike, og hvordan opplevelsene påvirker flyktnings velvære (følelsen av å være sunn og lykkelig). Dette er av interesse fordi integrering sjeldent er satt i sammenheng med velvære, og derfor er det viktig å lære om likheter og forskjeller mellom ulike flyktninggrupper, for bedre å forstå god helse og integreringsprosesser.

Du har blitt bedt om å delta ved å bli intervjuet, fordi du oppfyller følgende kriterier:

- Du kom alene som flyktning eller asylsøker i Norge, uten familiemedlemmer eller ektefelle.
- Du er 18 år eller eldre.
- Du snakker norsk og/eller engelsk.
- Du har kjennskap til introduksjonskurs i Norge, enten ved å være nåværende deltaker eller å ha fullført kurs.

#### **Hva vil det si å være deltaker i dette prosjektet?**

Du har blitt bedt om å delta i et intervju som vil vare mellom 30 minutter til maksimum en time. Du vil bli spurt om opplevelser med hensyn til utfordringer og ressurser du har opplevd når du flyttet til Norge. Jeg vil ta opp lyd av intervjuet, slik at jeg kan analysere svarene våren 2019 (senest innen juni 2019).

#### **Hva vil skje med svarene jeg oppgir?**

Svarene du gir vil kun brukes til mitt masterprosjekt, og vil ikke bli delt med andre som ikke er direkte involvert i studiet (meg selv og min rådgiver Marguerite Daniel, professor i avdelingen Health Promotion and Development på Universitetet i Bergen). Svarene dine vil bli anonymisert, og dine personlige opplysninger (ditt navn og mulige tilknytninger du har til organisasjoner eller institusjoner) vil bli behandlet konfidensielt: dine svar og ditt navn vil kun ligge på en data som bare jeg har passord til, og navn vil bli anonymisert. Analyse av dine svar vil være ferdig senest juni 2019; men lydopptaket av ditt intervju vil bli slettet så fort jeg har transkribert intervjuet (to uker etter vårt intervju). Du vil ikke være identifiserbar i min masteroppgave.

### **Dine rettigheter.**

I henhold til dine personlige opplysninger har du rett til å:

- Be om tilgang til dine personlige opplysninger,
- Be om rettelse, sletting eller begrensning av dine opplysninger,
- Motta en kopi av dine personlige opplysninger,
- Sende en klage til Personvernforbundet i henhold til behandling av dine personlige opplysninger.

Dette forskningsprosjektet har blitt meldt til- og godkjent av Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata (NSD).

### **Hva gir meg (forskeren) rettigheter til å behandle dine opplysninger?**

Jeg vil kun behandle dine opplysninger hvis du gir meg samtykke til det.

### **Frivillig deltakelse.**

Ditt valg om å delta i dette prosjektet er frivillig, og du kan trekke ditt samtykke når som helst uten å oppgi årsak. Hvis du ønsker å trekke deg vil alle dine svar og personlige opplysninger bli slettet.

### **Funn fra forskningsprosjektet.**

Du kan få en kopi av min masteroppgave etter at den har blitt levert.

### **Kontaktinformasjon.**

Ikke nøl med å kontakte meg hvis du har spørsmål: [elena.davanger@student.uib.no](mailto:elena.davanger@student.uib.no), eller via mobiltelefon +47 92637538.

Du kan også kontakte:

Universitetet i Bergen, Marguerite Daniel: [marguerite.daniel@uib.no](mailto:marguerite.daniel@uib.no) / +47 55 58 32 20

NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS: [personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no) / 55 58 21 17.

**Vennlig hilsen,**

Elena Davanger.

## Appendix 3: Interview Guide.

### Interview guide.

You have valuable knowledge regarding integrating into the Norwegian society as a young woman. I am a young woman myself, and I would like to learn how you experience the integration process. I want to learn from *you*, and thus there are no wrong answers. Thank you.

#### Basic information

1. Firstly, I would like to know some basic information:
  - What is your age?
  - What is your country of origin?
  - How long have you been here?
  - Who are you living with?
  
2. Can you please tell me about your life?
  - (*Interests, family situation, leisure time, studies, job*).
  - (*How do you experience your living situation?*)

#### Integration.

3. How do you understand the term integration?
  - (*How do you see getting an education and/or job as important for integrating?*)
  
4. What services/activities regarding integration in Norway do you know about?
  - (*Introduksjonscenteret, Røde Kors, Bymisjonen osv*).
  - What kind of activities have you been involved in? (*Flyktingguide, Norsktraining, kvinnegrupper osv*).
  - How have you experienced them? (*demanding? Motivating? – why*)
  - How much time do you spend on them?

#### Challenges.

5. How has integrating into the Norwegian society been challenging?
  - Why do you think this is so? (*Culture norms, material things/economy, relations, job market, difficulties at school, lack of support, missing family, poor services?*).
  - How have you experienced any type of discrimination? (*At work, in the street?*)
  - How have you experienced any language barriers?
  - How are you handling challenges/How have you overcome them?

#### Resources

6. What do you see as resources when integrating into a new society?
  - What are your resources?

- *(other potential resources: services/activities aimed at refugees, pets, exercise, material things?)*
- *What is your social network? (Norwegians? Others from own or different country? Colleagues? Friends at school?). (What has helped you make friends?)*
- *Do you see your network as a resource for integration? (help for school, general support, leisure time?).*

### **Meaningfulness**

7. What makes you feel happy?
  - *What makes you feel happy here in Norway? (What could make you feel happier? What can help you integrating well?)*
  - *What motivates your integration process? (Responsibility for others? Sending money back home? A bigger purpose?)*
  - *How do you see integration affecting self-esteem?*
  - *How well do you feel integrated?*

## Appendix 4: Interview Guide (special design used when interviewing).

### Basic

- Alder
- Land of origin
- Hvor lenge har du vært her?

### Tell me...

- Om livet ditt
- Interesser, familie, jobb, studier, fritid,
- *bosituasjon*.
- Hvordan opplever du den?

### Integrering.

Gen – integrering, hva er det/tolker du det som?

- Hvordan er jobb/utd viktig for int?
- Egen kultur?

### Tilbud/aktiviteter

Mtp integrering, hvilke tilbud vet du om? (*Introduk.senteret, RK, BM*).

- Involvert?
- Opplevelse?
- Tid brukt?

### Utfordringer.

- Hvordan har int i det norske smf vært utfordrende?
- Hvorfor? (*normer, øko, arb.market, savn, lite støtte?*)
- *Opplevd disk?*
- Språkbarrierer?
- Er det slik for andre også? (*Somaliere, Syrere, andre*)
- Hvordan håndterer du dette, takler dem?

### Ressurs/styrke/positive ting/støtte

- Gen: hva ser du som ressurser når man integrerer i et nytt smf?
- Hva er dine? (*pets, exc, øko, nettverk, tilbud?*)
- Hva er nettverket ditt? (*venner, kollegaer, studkam, nordmenn, andre?*)
- Hvordan ser du på nettverket ditt som en mulig ressurs? (*braker du det bevisst for noe? Hjelp, fritid*)

### Meaningfulness

- Hva gjør deg glad?
- Hva gjør deg glad her? (*hva kan gjøre deg mere glad, gjøre int enklere?*)
- Ha motiverer intg.prosessen din? (*ansvar for andre, en større mening/rel, sende penger hjem?*)
- Hvordan synes du integrering påvirker selvfølelse, selvtillit?
- Hvor godt føler du deg integrert?

## Appendix 5: Clearance from NSD.

NSD Personvern 12.11.2018 13:27

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 297695 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt: Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 12.11.2018 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

**MELD ENDRINGER** Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

**TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET** Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om rasemessig eller etnisk opprinnelse og alminnelige personopplysninger frem til 15.06.2019.

**LOVLIG GRUNNLAG** Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

**PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER** NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen: - om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen - formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål - dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet - lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

**DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER** Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20). NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13. Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

**FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER** NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32). NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til behandling av personopplysninger utenfor EU (personvernforordningen kapittel 5). For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må prosjektansvarlig følge interne retningslinjer/rådføre seg med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

**OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET** NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet. Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Øivind Armando Reinertsen Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

## **Appendix 6: Second clearance from NSD.**

NSD Personvern 01.07.2019 12:45

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 297695 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt: NSD har vurdert endringen registrert 27.06.2019.

Vi har nå registrert 20.11.2019 som ny sluttdato for forskningsperioden. Vi gjør oppmerksom på at ytterligere forlengelse ikke kan påregnes uten at utvalget informeres om forlengelsen.

NSD vil følge opp underveis (hvert annet år) og ved ny planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet/pågår i tråd med den behandlingen som er dokumentert.

Lykke til videre med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Kajsa Amundsen Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

## Appendix 7: Table of themes.

Table of themes: themes that emerged during the thematic network analysis.

Basic themes	Organizing Themes	Global Themes
- To know language is important for integration	Being able to understand	<b>Perceptions about integration</b>
- I feel integrated	A core feeling	
- Dedication - Reflection and respect	An effort	
- Not knowing the language well - Inadequate language classes	Language barriers	<b>Challenges when integrating</b>
- Experiencing norms alone - Living alone - Loneliness - Broken dreams	Challenges within oneself	
- Getting a job is difficult - Syrians learn faster	Job-related stress	
- Verbal discrimination - Physical discrimination	Negative perceptions from others	
- Woman and men are not equal - Culture prejudice - I can't identify with the elderly in my community	Stress from own community	
- Norwegians are more reserved - Hijab scares Norwegians - Norwegians want us to assimilate	Culture clash with Norwegians	
- Norwegians help me settling in - Experts and services - Inner circle	Network and organizations	
- I am a hard worker - Getting out there	Determination	
- More freedom	Norms and possibilities	
- Feeling powerful - Strong sense of identity - Brush off negativity - Positive thinking	Personal strength	
- Helping others - Socializing - Contributing	External contentment	
- I want to study and get a good job - It feels good to be independent	Internal contentment	<b>Happiness</b>