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## Resilience factors in women of refugee background

### A qualitative systematic review

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## RESILIENCE FACTORS IN WOMEN OF REFUGEE BACKGROUND: A QUALITATIVE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Clare Hawkes\*, Kimberley Norris\*\*, Janine Joyce\* and Douglas Paton\*

*Women of Refugee Background (WoRB) are identified as being understudied, despite making up half of the world's refugee population. Resilience is a common characteristic ascribed to WoRB and is often identified as a core factor influencing long-term wellbeing. Despite this, there is increasing doubts regarding the validity of hegemonic Western understandings of resilience and associated theoretical frameworks when applied to refugee populations. The aim of this systematic review was to investigate factors endorsed by WoRB as contributing to their resilience. Furthermore, it aimed to identify theoretical frameworks which have been applied in research to help contextualise and interpret resilience research focusing on WoRB. The current review identified 30 relevant studies following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Religion/spirituality, culture, children, social support, family, personal characteristics and formalised supports were key themes identified as being endorsed by WoRB as contributing to their resilience. Identified resilience frameworks used within research were also discussed along with the theoretical and practical implications.*

**Keywords:** *refugee, resilience, review, women of refugee background, systematic literature review*

### 1. Introduction

In 2018, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide reached 70.8 million, which is the largest recorded number of forcibly displaced persons in human history (Hynie, 2018). Of these individuals, 25.9 million were identified as refugees (UNHCR, 2019). According to the Refugee Convention (1951), a refugee is an individual who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, social or political affiliation.

Women and girls make up approximately 50% of refugees globally (Grandi, 2017). At every stage of the refugee journey, women are at greater risk of experiencing and being exposed to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, trafficking, and early or forced marriages, particularly when travelling alone or only accompanied by children (Freedman, 2016). They also experience a range of socio-cultural disadvantages including a lack of social support, greater language barriers, discrimination due to their gender (Shishehgar, Gholizadeh, DiGiacomo, Green, & Davidson, 2017) and difficulties in adjusting to countries which may have vastly different gendered beliefs and roles in comparison to their country of origin (Darychuk & Jackson,

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2015). These notable vulnerabilities have been recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) and have resulted in a unique refugee resettlement category for Women and Girls at Risk. This prioritises the resettlement of women who are deemed to have insufficient protection due to their gender and a lack of effective protection which may normally be provided by male family members (Betts et al., 2013; Vromans et al., 2018). Despite the recognition within the policy and academic literature, outside of research focusing on reproductive and antenatal health, women remain underrepresented in the developing body of literature on the refugee experience (Freedman, 2016; O'Mahony et al., 2013; Shishehgar et al., 2017).

WoRB have been identified as being at greater risk of mental health issues (Wohler & Dantas, 2017), with available research suggesting that WoRB show higher levels of psychopathology than males of refugee background, including PTSD (Eytan et al., 2007; Olf et al., 2007; Schubert & Punamäki, 2011; Tolin & Foa, 2006), depression (Schubert & Punamäki, 2011; Schweitzer et al., 2006) and anxiety (Shishehgar et al., 2017). Research has further identified that gender significantly and robustly moderates levels of reported distress within the resettlement phase, with WoRB reporting higher levels of distress than males of refugee background (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017).

Despite being at greater risk of developing psychopathology, there is also a small body of emerging literature indicating that women are more resilient than men in refugee populations (Shishehgar et al., 2017), which aligns with the notion that resilience and psychological distress are not necessarily opposites, but rather can be experienced concurrently, and may represent different aspects of coping and adjustment to abnormal events (Bussey & Wise, 2007).

Although 'resilience' is mentioned within literature focusing on refugees, there is a paucity of research actually investigating the concept, resulting in a limited understanding of what resilience is and looks like in refugee populations (Lau, 2013; Yotebieng et al., 2018). The paucity of research investigating resilience in refugees has further hindered the capacity for resilience to be understood in this population through a theoretical lens informed by a pre-existing research. This has resulted in the application of pre-existing resilience theories to research investigating refugee populations despite doubts regarding the validity of our current hegemonic Western understanding of resilience (as a construct) when applied to non-Western cultural groups (Pearce et al., 2017). Resultantly, researchers have identified a need for a culturally-grounded approach to resilience research in refugee populations (Panter-Brick et al., 2017), as this will provide individuals from various cultural groups with the opportunity to define their own concepts of what resilience constitutes (Pearce et al., 2017).

Within the broader psychological literature, definitions of resilience vary (Pearce et al., 2017). Resilience has been defined as a capacity to resist and recover from a negative impact (Zhou et al., 2010) and as a buffer which enables an individual to absorb, respond and recover from a traumatic event or shock (Panter-Brick et al., 2017). These definitions suggest that resilience is a stable construct which protects an individual from experiencing distress, yet distress is ultimately a normal reaction to an abnormal circumstance (Norris et al., 2008). Furthermore, conceptualising resilience as a stable construct does little to guide interventions aimed at fostering resilience in trauma survivors, such as refugees, as it suggests some individuals do not '*have what it takes*' to overcome abnormal circumstances (Maung, 2019). Within the ever-growing body of literature, resilience is discussed more frequently as a multidimensional construct which incorporates an individual's personal skills and qualities together with environmental factors such as a supportive

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social and familial networks (Siriwardhana et al., 2014), thus shifting away from the notion that resilience is a purely personal attribute, such as self-esteem or hardiness (Meyer, 2015).

The identification that the majority of resilience research has overlooked potential socio-cultural and socio-political factors has led to a new wave of resilience research in which the cultural and social-ecological aspects are identified as key in assisting our understanding of resilience (Ni et al., 2014). Within this conceptualisation, it is recognised that resilience does not occur in isolation, but rather is an interactive process which is influenced by contextual factors, the environment and our relationships to them (Yotebieng et al., 2018). This challenges the typical assumption that lies within many Western-based frameworks, which propose that resilience is a simplistic outcome which can be linked to person-level stressors and protective factors which can be measured and juxtaposed (Lenette, 2011). Thus, at this stage, research investigating resilience in refugee populations should not aim to develop a theory surrounding resilience, but rather should aim to understand how resilience is understood in refugee populations and what factors they see as contributing to their resilience and why (Yotebieng et al., 2018).

The investigation of resilience in WoRB is limited but argued to be vital (Shishehgar et al., 2017). A review conducted by Shishehgar et al. (2017) can be identified as one of the few efforts to synthesise research investigating the health of WoRB. Although the review focused on health in general, it was identified that WoRB utilise spirituality and social supports as resilience strategies to maintain equilibrium despite ongoing distress (Shishehgar et al., 2017). Although this review can be argued as the only identifiable publication to include a review of resilience in WoRB, it did not explicitly search for, or investigate resilience within the search terms, or keywords, thus making it likely that articles which would provide vital insights into resilience in WoRB were missed.

Overall, it has been argued that resilience is a vital protective factor in the face of a distressing event in WoRB (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Keygnaert et al., 2012; Schweitzer et al., 2006; Shishehgar et al., 2017; Sossou et al., 2008). However, further research is needed to help develop a greater understanding of resilience to provide a more holistic conceptualisation of mental health and adaptation in refugee populations (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2013; Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012).

This review aims to synthesise pre-existing research investigating resilience in WoRB with two core aims: the first was to identify the frameworks that had been used to investigate resilience in WoRB and the rationale of the applicability of the given framework to this population. The second was to identify factors which were endorsed by WoRB as contributing to their resilience and the processes by which this occurred.

## **2. Method**

Results were reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Statement (Moher et al., 2009), with quality assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) (Singh, 2013) (See Supplementary Material). Studies were rated as ‘high quality’ (meeting at least 8 of the 10 criteria with a *yes* rating), ‘medium quality’ (meeting 5–7 of the criteria with a *yes* rating) and ‘low quality’ (meeting 4 or less with a *yes* rating). The review was also registered with PROSPERO in September 2018 (CRD42018105408).

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## 2.1. Search strategy

An electronic database search was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsychInfo and ProQuest were searched using the following search strings, Refugee AND (Women OR Female) AND (Resilien\*), applied in titles, abstracts, and keywords.

## 2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

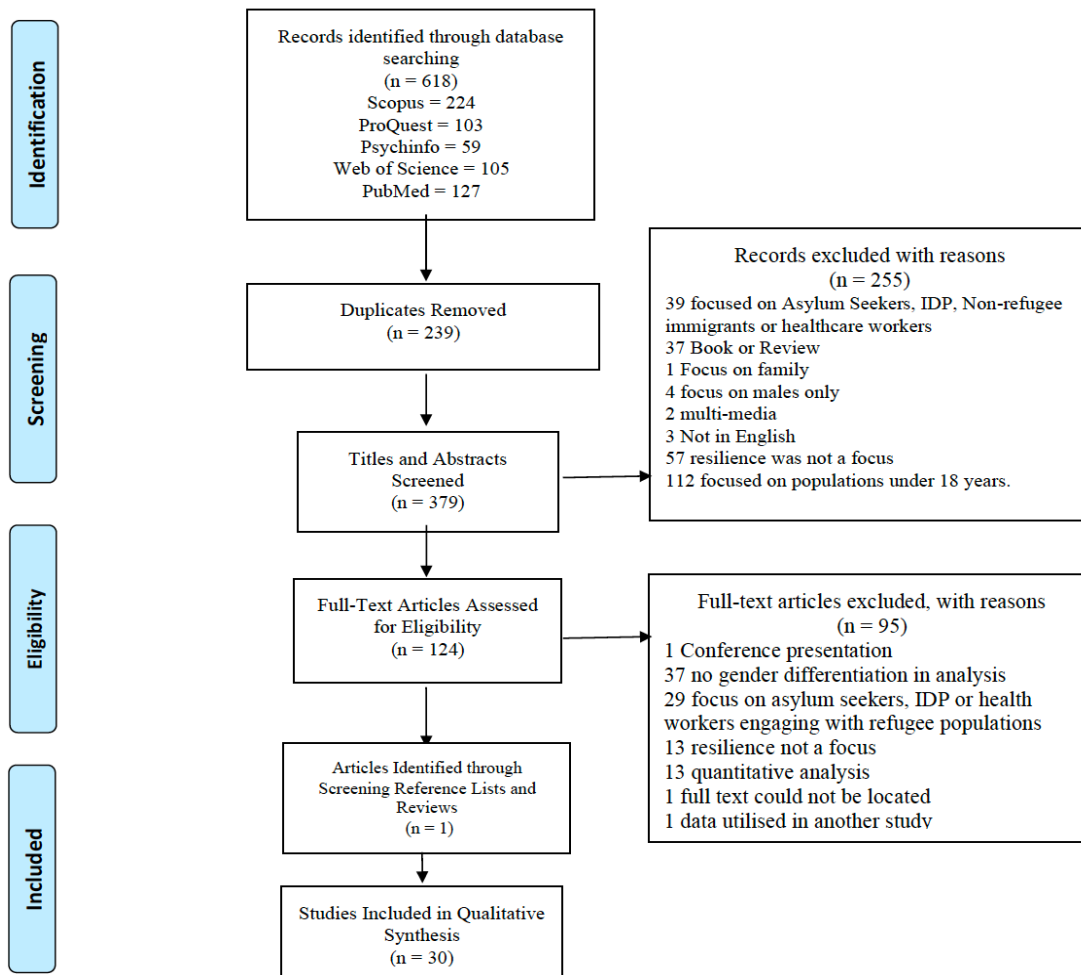
Studies were eligible for inclusion if they met the following inclusion criteria: (1) Participants were female; (2) Participants within the study were identified as refugees; (3) the research focused on resilience, or factors associated with resilience; (4) the research was qualitative in nature; (5) Published prior to the 27 March 2020, when the final search was conducted.

Studies were excluded if: (1) participants were under 18 years; (2) participants were male; (3) gender differentiation did not occur in the analysis if data was collected from both genders; (4) participants were asylum seekers, internally displaced person or healthcare workers; (5) published as popular media; (6) were a secondary analysis of data already identified as included in other studies; (7) written in a language other than English or (8) Quantitative studies using measures without adequate psychometric properties. Quantitative studies were excluded for several reasons. Firstly, only three quantitative measures investigating resilience in adult populations have been identified as holding adequate psychometric properties (Windle et al., 2011). These measures were not utilised in any identified studies during the full text review. Furthermore, the several studies which were identified as utilising a quantitative measure of resilience were excluded due to other exclusion criteria. A random selection of studies (20%) were double coded by the first and second author to assess the quality of studies included that met the explicit criteria, with 100% inter-rater agreements found (Cohen's  $k=1.0$ ).

An initial search yielded 618 studies; once duplicates were removed, 239 articles remained. Applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 255 articles were excluded. A full text review was conducted on 124 studies, resulting in a further 95 studies being excluded. The reference lists of the remaining eligible articles and other publications (e.g: associated reviews of literature) (Babatunde-Sowole et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Shishehgar et al., 2017) were searched for relevant studies, with 1 new relevant text identified. As a result, 30 articles were included in the review (Figure 1).

## 3. Results

Utilising the CASP guidelines, the majority of the identified studies were rated as high quality, with two studies identified as medium quality (Denzongpa & Nichols, 2020; Gakuba et al., 2015) and three studies rated as low quality (Carranza, 2012; Vesely et al., 2017). Due to this being the first review to investigate resilience in WoRB, all studies were included regardless of quality.



**Figure 1. Flow Diagram for Literature Search and Study Selection**

### **3.1. Demographics**

A total of 408 WoRB participated across the 30 included studies. Specific participant demographic information is listed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Included Articles**

Author	YoP	SS	CoO	CoR	ToP	Identified Resilience Factors	Resilience Framework Used
Abraham et al.	2018	18	Eritrean	Norway	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positivity</li> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Hope for the future</li> </ul>	Antonovsky's Concept of Salutogenesis
Baird et al.	2012	10	South Sudan	US	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-support</li> <li>• Hope for the future</li> <li>• Connection to community</li> </ul>	Middle-range Theory of Transitions
Bowen	2012	12	El-Salvador	Canada	PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength</li> <li>• Religion/Faith</li> <li>• Commitment to Family</li> <li>• Pragmatism</li> </ul>	
Byrskog et al.	2014	17	Somalia	Sweden	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength</li> <li>• Inner Strength</li> <li>• Trust in God</li> </ul>	
Carranza Chung et al.	2012 2013	1 9	El-Salvador Hungary, Nigeria, Iraq, Cameroon, Afghanistan, Sudan, Congo	Canada Canada	PRA PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memories of Time Spent as a Family</li> <li>• Support from the Government</li> <li>• Support from the NGO</li> <li>• Religious Contact</li> <li>• Cultural Contact</li> <li>• Strength</li> <li>• Positive Attitude</li> </ul>	Asset-Focused Model
Clark et al.	2014	12	Libya	US	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in a New Environment</li> <li>• Situating Self in the Narrative</li> <li>• Outward Face</li> </ul>	
Denzongpa et al	2020	1	Bhutan	US	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Seeking Educational Opportunities</li> <li>• Leadership within Community</li> </ul>	

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Darychuk et al.	2015	31	Palestine	Refugee Bank on the West Bank	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reproducing Social Traditions</li> <li>• Religious Affiliation</li> <li>• Raising Children</li> <li>• Working Outside the Home</li> <li>• Meeting Spaces</li> </ul>	Norris et al. Community Resilience & Kimayer et al. Community Resilience
Dubus	2018	8	Syria	Iceland	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role within the Family</li> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Ability to Care and Connect with Family</li> <li>• Feeling Safe</li> </ul>	
El-Radi	2015	7	South Sudan	US	PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spirituality</li> <li>• Community Church</li> <li>• Family Support</li> <li>• Inner Strength</li> </ul>	
Gakuba et al.	2015		African Countries	Abidjan-Ivory Coast and Dakar-Senegal	Book Chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Dependence</li> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Social Structures</li> </ul>	
Hales	2003	7	Laos	US	PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patience and Independence</li> <li>• Traditional Beliefs and Faith</li> <li>• Helping Other People</li> </ul>	Butler, 1997
Holscher et al.	2012	2		South Africa	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive Network</li> <li>• Spiritual Connection</li> <li>• Emotional Support</li> </ul>	Nussbaum, 2000
Lenette et al.	2012	4	Sudan, Burundi, DRC	Australia	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overcoming Daily Challenges</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Social Support</li> </ul>	Ungar, 2011
Maung	2018	11	Burma	US	PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living a 'Normal' Meaningful Life</li> <li>• Social Support</li> <li>• Instrumental Support</li> </ul>	

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							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hopefulness and Aspirations for the Future</li> <li>• Religion and Spiritual Coping</li> <li>• Personal Self-Care</li> <li>• Cognitive Coping</li> <li>• Emotional Support</li> <li>• Religion and Spirituality</li> <li>• Positive Self-Talk</li> <li>• Social Supports</li> <li>• Self-direction</li> <li>• Culture of Origin</li> </ul>	
Moio	2008	15	Africa, Far East Asia, South East Asia, South America	US	PhD			
Mrayan	2016	43	Syria	Refugee Camp (Za'atari)	PhD		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Provide for Family</li> <li>• Seeking Social Support/Networking</li> <li>• Self-Empowerment</li> </ul>	
Munt	2012	9	Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iran, Eritrea, Sri-Lanka, Sierra Leon, Cameroon	UK	PRA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion</li> </ul>	
Nashwan et al.	2017	22	Iraq	US	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Realistic Expectations</li> <li>• Self-Determination</li> <li>• Social Support</li> </ul>	Conservation of Resources Theory	
Pearce et al.	2016	8	South Sudan	Canada	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith and Spirituality</li> <li>• Circle of Support</li> <li>• Global Community</li> </ul>		
Pham	2016	6	East Africa	US	PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having Faith</li> <li>• Helping Others</li> <li>• Hope for their Children's Future</li> </ul>		
Phan	2006	10	Vietnam	Canada	Book Chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of Cultural Integrity</li> </ul>		

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Ross – Sheriff	2006	60	Pakistan	Afghanistan	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s Future</li> <li>• Faith and Religion</li> <li>• Providing Support</li> <li>• Maintaining Hope</li> </ul>	
Sesay	2015	6	Sierra Leon	UK	PhD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Connection</li> <li>• Community Connection</li> <li>• Religion and Faith</li> <li>• Cultural Values</li> <li>• Solidarity with other Women</li> <li>• Social Role as a Women.</li> </ul>	Adversity Activated Development – Trauma Grid
Sherwood et al.	2012	6	Africa	UK	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Positive Thinking</li> <li>• Positive Self-talk</li> <li>• Hope</li> <li>• Problem Solving</li> </ul>	
Smit et al.	2015	60	DRC Burundi Zimbabwe	South Africa	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want for Families Survival</li> <li>• God</li> <li>• Love and Concern for Children</li> </ul>	Strumpfer 2001
Sossou et al.	2008	7	Bosnia	US	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of Family</li> <li>• Spirituality</li> </ul>	Antonovsky’s Sense of Coherence.
Vesely et al.	2017	1	Africa	US	PRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for Children</li> <li>• Different Life for Children</li> </ul>	Ungar 2011

Note. YoP = Year of Publication. SS = Sample Size. CoO = County of Origin. CoR = Country of Resettlement. ToP = Type of Publication. PRA = Peer Reviewed Article

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### ***3.1. Theoretical frameworks applied in research investigating resilience in WoRB***

#### ***3.2.1. Antonovsky's concept of salutogenesis***

Antonovsky's (1996) concept of salutogenesis stemmed from research focusing on stress, with an emphasis on how people remain healthy, rather than getting sick. This framework challenges the pathogenic perception of normality/pathology (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986). Salutogenesis is conceptualised as a psychological construct and stress buffering resource, corresponding with what Antonovsky called sense of coherence (SOC), which allowed a person to maintain and move towards health even in the midst of trauma and change, as the stressful events were perceived as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Antonovsky, 1993). SOC is strongly associated with perceived mental health (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006), and has been conceptualised as a 'resilience' factor. Within the articles referencing salutogenesis and SOC (N=2), it was identified that WoRB viewed their psychological problems as normal under the circumstances (Abraham et al., 2018), and maintained positive attitudes despite significant loss and trauma (Sossou et al., 2008), thus suggesting a high SOC.

#### ***3.2.2. Middle range theory of transitions***

Middle-range theory of transitions (Meleis et al., 2000) was utilised as a framework in the Baird and Boyle (2012) study investigating the well-being of Sudanese WoRB. This framework assumes that transitions are a natural part of life and considered positive (Meleis et al., 2000). The theory identifies three types of individual transitions including developmental, health-illness and situational transitions. WoRB were identified as experiencing these transitions, often simultaneously, with resilience themes within the study described as contributing to the process of how WoRB transition towards well-being during resettlement (Baird & Boyle, 2012).

#### ***3.2.3. Asset-focused model***

Chung et al. (2013) utilised an asset-focused model which emphasises identifying strengths which promote resilience. This model was argued as applicable as it aims to identify factors which support WoRB to overcome barriers and promote integration to the host society. Using this framework, Chung et al. (2013) viewed resilience in WoRB as being enhanced by accessible resilience supporting assets such as support from the government, NGO's and religious and cultural contacts.

#### ***3.2.4. Community resilience models***

Darychuk and Jackson (2015) highlighted two models within their research investigating community resilience in WoRB. Norris et al's (2008) model postulates community resilience as a set of adaptive capacities including economic development, social capital, cultural competence and information, and communication. These adaptive capacities function together to reinforce personal abilities to handle adversity. Norris et al's (2008) model is most commonly applied to short-term disaster readiness situations. The second model developed by Kirmayer et al. (2009) focuses more on displaced populations over a long period of time. Within this model, community

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resilience is conceptualised as incorporating social capital, ecological capital, cultural knowledge, values and practices, family and community connectedness and connection to the land. Further, the temporal dimension within this model is one of the only models to acknowledge that resilience may be an adaptive process over time, rather than a static concept. Darychuk & Jackson (2015) identified that the coping strategies used by WoRB closely mapped onto several aspects of Kiramyer et al.'s (2009) model, particularly connection to the land and collective knowledge and identity. However, factors within Norris et al.'s (2008) model, such as community action and information exchange, were not as endorsed. This was postulated to be due to the chronicity of their conditions, and Norris et al.'s (2008) model being more applicable to individuals in acute disaster situations.

### ***3.2.5. Butler's (1997) conceptualisation of resilience***

Butler (1997) conceptualised resilience as a complex relationship between inner strengths and outer help. Within this, resilience stems from a web of relationships and experiences which teach mastery, 'doggedness', love, moral courage and hope. Parallels with this were drawn in Hales's (2003) study as factors which they identified as contributing to WoRB's resilience were argued to have been acquired and developed through a web of relationships with parents and peers and life experiences.

### ***3.2.6. Ungar's (2011) social ecological model of resilience***

Ungar (2011) social ecological model of resilience emphasises both individual characteristics and environmental factors. Ungar (2011) proposed four principles to consider when examining factors contributing to resilience development, including decentrality (a focus away from the individual experiencing adversity or the environment, and acknowledgment of the bi-directional process between the two), complexity (the need for contextual and temporal specific models to explain resilience related outcomes), atypicality (acknowledgement that resilience may be fostered and manifest in unsocially desirable ways which are necessary for survival), and cultural relativity (positive growth under stress is culturally and temporally embedded). This theoretical framework acknowledges an indeterminate relationship between psychological factors and environmental factors, and a need to understand the context in which the adversity is occurring. It additionally acknowledges the individual's capacity to navigate resources, and more importantly the availability of resources to the person. Parallels with this theory were drawn in Lenette et al.'s (2013) research, as WoRB had to use creativity in drawing upon available resources within their communities, such as social support, to protect themselves from the impact of adversities. Likewise et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of this theoretical framework, as Ungar's (2011) framework acknowledges the interaction between an individual's ability and the social, political and physical environment, which will ultimately shape WoRB's resilience.

### ***3.2.7. Nussbaum (2000) human capabilities approach***

The human capabilities approach considers how people are positioned and what they are able to do with personal, social and material resources that are available to them to achieve well-being (Nussbaum, 2000). Within this framework, well-being is conceptualised as of primary moral importance to humans, and achieving this well-being depends upon capabilities, or real

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opportunities to do what people value. Within this, capabilities have been conceptualised in relation to resilience as they are the factors which allow an individual to recover and improve post adversity. Holscher et al. (2012) drew upon this theoretical framework to explain how WoRB maintained their resilience through preserved humanity and continued assertion of their agency despite disadvantages including their social position and being challenged by social hierarchies. Within this, Holscher et al. (2012) argued that the WoRB's capabilities provided them a structure to be resilient.

### ***3.2.8. Conservation of resources theory***

According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001), individuals strive to maintain resources. Resources may include tangible objects (such as food) and conditions (such as a stable environment), as well as personal attachments and cultural affiliations. Experiencing a traumatic event can be viewed as a threat to and/or result in a loss of resources. However, within the COR theory, loss of resources due to a stressful event or trauma can be buffered by coping strategies and social supports. It has been argued that the application of the COR theory within a resilience framework takes into consideration the familial, communal and societal resources which contribute to resilience (Nashwan et al., 2017), thus suggesting that resilience is heavily influenced by the resources available. Nashwan et al. (2017) identified that refugees face a myriad of stressful events and traumas which limit their resources throughout all stages of the refugee journey and utilised the COR theory to investigate which resources WoRB identified as essential for resilience.

### ***3.2.9. Trauma/adversity grid***

Papadopoulos (2007) Trauma/Adversity Grid is a theoretical framework which identifies a range of possible and relevant consequences of a traumatic experience. Within this framework, adversity-activated development refers to the positive developments which assist with new personal growth following exposure to adversity and retained positive strengths, or resilience. Sesay (2015) considered this framework as integral when understanding key concepts contributing to resilience in Sierra Leonean WoRB, as the women acknowledged that despite the trauma and losses, they still have access to factors associated with positive strengths, such as their religious faith, their family and community bonds, which align with the resilience dimensions according to the grid.

### ***3.2.10. Strümpfer's conceptualisation of resilience***

Strümpfer (2001) conceptualised resilience as an active attempt to engage in goal-directed behaviour to cope when faced with inordinate demands. Within this 'resiling' (an evolving process over time which occurs when people successfully deal with stress) starts when someone perceives a challenge or threat. Strümpfer (2001) acknowledged that resilience manifested itself in the face of core demanding circumstances including exceptionally challenging experiences, developmental transitions, individual adversity, collective adversity, organisational change or large-scale socio-political change. Smit and Rugunanan (2015) indicated that Strümpfer (2001) provided a framework to understand resilience in WoRB, as these women remained strong and made an active attempt to continue in the face of inordinate demands.

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### ***3.2.11. Family resilience***

Walsh's (2015) theory places an emphasis on resilience at the family level. This theory postulates that functional families have the capacity to cope and adapt when faced with adversity, however, pre-existing dysfunction can result in greater threat and increase the risk of poorer outcomes. The Family and Adjustment and Adaption Response model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) is another framework in which resilience is conceptualised as a dynamic and complex family level process, which requires analysis of the family system as a group unit. This model focuses on how familial demands, resources, strengths and problem-solving capacities interact to help families adjust, adapt and build resilience in the face of stressors. Vesely et al. (2017) utilised both these theoretical framework for guidance when investigating the resilience in families, as told by WoRB, and highlighted the importance of considering structural factors at the familial level.

### ***3.2.12. Transactional model of stress and coping***

The transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987) is a fundamental theory which has been used in a plethora of research investigating coping. According to this model, coping represents the engagement of an individual's best responses following the appraisal of a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Although coping does not imply greater well-being, it has been identified as an integral component of resilient adaptation to trauma and loss. Welsh and Brodsky (2010) utilised this framework as an introduction to why studying coping processes in WoRB is integral to better understand resilience processes.

### ***3.2.13. The broaden and build theory of positive emotions***

The broaden and build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) is a framework which is useful in understanding the relationship between positive emotions and resilience. Within this, positive emotions broaden an individual's attention, thought processes and behavioural repertoire. Welsh and Brodsky (2010) drew upon this theoretical framework to explain how positive emotions may assist WoRB in resilient adaptation.

## ***3.3. Emerging themes identified as contributing to resilience***

### ***3.3.1. Religion/spirituality***

Religion, faith or a belief in a high power/God was the most commonly endorsed factor contributing to resilience in WoRB, being cited in 22 of the 30 studies. Religion, or belief in a higher power such as God, was conceptualised as a shield which helped WoRB get through difficult times and past traumas (Abraham et al., 2018). This belief in a higher power provided a justification for not only their suffering, but their survival when so many others did not (Baird & Boyle, 2012; Mrayan, 2016; Pearce et al., 2017; Pham, 2017; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012). Religion also provided stability and security during periods of immense change and distress, and orientated them within their daily life when minimal structure could be implemented (Abraham et al., 2018; Moio, 2008; Munt, 2012; Smit & Rugunanan, 2015). This helped them

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cope with situations they could not explain via identifying it as ‘part of God’s plan’ (El-Radi, 2015). Religion allowed them to forgive and build strength from not only their current situation but also past traumas (Gakuba et al., 2015; Mrayan, 2016; Sossou et al., 2008). Connecting with God or a higher power was engaged in via prayer, meditation or attending church, which had additional positive flow on effects of building resources such as material and social support (Abraham et al., 2018; Bowen, 1999; Chung et al., 2013; Gakuba et al., 2015; Moio, 2008; Munt, 2012; Welsh & Brodsky, 2010).

Religion and spirituality are not specifically identified, or emphasised, as a factor contributing to resilience in the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, however, could be accounted for in a number of the identified theoretical frameworks utilised in resilience research focusing on WoRB. Religion could be identified as contributing to a SOC (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986) in WoRB, as religion is described as providing a stability during immense change (manageability), and helped them cope with situations they could not explain (meaningfulness). It could also be accounted for as a factor which assisted the WoRB to maintain their strength (Papadopoulos, 2007; Strümpfer, 2001), or as a resource or asset which WoRB pull upon to help overcome the adversity they are experiencing (Hobfoll, 2001; Nussbaum, 2000). Despite being accounted for in a number of the theoretical frameworks, the fact that religion is so consistently endorsed across research, suggests that it may be a factor which warrants more explicit recognition within resilience frameworks applied to WoRB.

### ***3.3.2. Protection or connection of/to culture***

Protection of, and connection to, the culture of origin was another factor which WoRB identified as contributing to their resilience. Culture of the origin was conceptualised as a ‘glue’ which held WoRB together and provided them with a personal identity and self-worth as they navigated their new environments (Sesay, 2015). Continued connections with the culture of origin also provided informal support systems (Chung et al., 2013), which allowed a sharing of cultural resources, language, and food. Engaging in these culturally-based activities allowed the WoRB to reaffirm their culture and provided them with a connection to their homeland (Moio, 2008). A lack of these informal culturally-based social supports was identified as a significant predictor of loneliness and poor mental health in WoRB (Chung et al., 2013). Connection with culture of origin was also identified as providing WoRB with a vital ongoing role, via teaching their children and the wider community a respect for their culture and practices. This provided the WoRB with a strong sense of meaning in their new lives and a source of hope, which contributed to their mental strength (Darychuk & Jackson, 2015). Engagement with the new host culture was also identified as contributing to resilience, particularly engagement in new opportunities, such as working outside the home and engaging in education. However, this could also cause a liminal state between the two cultures, as the engagement in the new opportunities often conflicted with traditional practices in the culture of origin (Baird & Boyle, 2012).

Culture was emphasised as a specific factor in several theoretical frameworks applied in research focusing on WoRB. Most notably in Ungar’s (2013) model which argues that positive growth under stress is culturally and temporally embedded, but also within Community Resilience frameworks (Kirmayer et al., 2009; Norris et al., 2008). Within this, WoRB identified that their resilience was strongly linked to their cultural identity, which was expressed via engagement in daily activities, including teaching their children about their culture of origin and sharing their cultural knowledge (Kirmayer et al., 2009; Ungar, 2011).

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### **3.3.3. *Child's future***

WoRB indicated their children contributed to their resilience. Raising children engendered a sense of pride and provided them with a role within their communities, linking them to traditional values which were highly valued in their countries of origin (Darychuk & Jackson, 2015). WoRB also identified that hope for their children's future and the opportunities their children had made them resilient and improved their emotional well-being (Pham, 2017; Smit & Rugunanan, 2015). These future aspirations and hopes for their children were influenced by the rationale that the sacrifices and distress was worth it (Pham, 2017; Smit & Rugunanan, 2015; Vesely et al., 2017), as their children were now safe and did not have to go through the challenges they experienced (Vesely et al., 2017).

WoRB linking their resilience to their children can be accounted for in several of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, including how positive emotions assist with resilience in regard to broadening thought processes and attention (Fredrickson, 2001) and linking their resilience to personal attachments (Hobfoll, 2001), which provided them with love and hope. The aspirations for their children also influenced the rationalisation that past sacrifices and distress was worth it, which aligns with other resilience theories (Antonovsky & Sagy, 1986), as the past events may be interpreted as more meaningful, thus contributing to a SOC.

### **3.3.4. *Social support***

Social support, particularly from social groups from their own culture of origin, was identified as a vital component of resilience in WoRB and important for emotional and practical adjustment. This is because social support provided an outlet for social healing through shared views, challenges, and suffering, and provided an opportunity for WoRB to learn from each other in a new environment, creating an awareness that they were not alone (Maung, 2019; Mrayan, 2016; Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). This resulted in enhanced coping, strong social bonds, positive feelings, a sense of belonging and comfort (Moio, 2008; Mrayan, 2016). These social connections from their culture of origin were also identified as imperative in maintaining their communities (Pearce et al., 2017). Social support from members of the host countries was also identified as a factor contributing to resilience via facilitating access to resources and providing a sense of acceptance and ability to adapt (Nashwan et al., 2017). Although social support was identified numerous times as a vital factor contributing to resilience, social support from social groups from the same culture of origin could also be a source of distress. This was due to community gossip and scrutiny due to the WoRB engaging in opportunities outside their traditional practices, such as raising children without a husband or accessing education (Lenette et al., 2013).

Social support is accounted for within a majority of the listed frameworks utilised to investigate resilience in WoRB. Fundamentally, these frameworks acknowledge that social support, albeit not always specifically termed 'social support' (web of relationships in Butler (1997); Social Capital in Norris et al. (2008); Personal attachments in Hobfoll (2001); family and community connectedness in Kirmayer et al. (2009)), is an external resource which WoRB can pull upon, and utilise to cope and adapt with adversity.



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### 3.3.5. *Family*

Family was identified as a major source of resilience for WoRB. Family provided a sense of purpose, whilst looking after family was endorsed as core factor which kept them going (Bowen, 1999; Byrskog et al., 2014). For WoRB, looking after their family often required them to fulfil new roles within the family, particularly if the male was no longer in the family unit (Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). Family provided WoRB with a key source of social and emotional support, a sense of safety and security, and helped them cope with life challenges and adaptation in their new environment (El-Radi, 2015; Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). Having this commitment to their family and a role in keeping everyone together allowed them to develop an inner-strength and helped them overcome the traumatic experiences which they had experienced (Sesay, 2015; Sossou et al., 2008). For WoRB, family was described as a safe-place, and their family was safe then they had ‘no right’ to give up. These strong links to family and strength derived from family was identified as stemming from the culture of origin (Sossou et al., 2008; Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). Family remained a key factor contributing to resilience even when separated, with the opportunity to connect being facilitated via technology (Dubus, 2018; Nashwan et al., 2017)

Family is considered a fundamental factor in several of the aforementioned frameworks (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Walsh, 2015). These models conceptualise resilience occurring at the family level, rather than a factor which may be contributing, or influencing, resilience. In contrast to this, the above-mentioned findings suggest that WoRB have endorsed family as a factor which contributed to their resilience, via providing them with a sense of purpose, and social connectedness. As the current review is focusing on resilience factors endorsed by individuals (WoRB), rather than by entire family units (i.e., refugee families), it is difficult to critique the applicability of these models.

### 3.3.6. *Personal characteristics*

A number of personal characteristics were identified by WoRB as contributing to their resilience. Strength was a central characteristic which was cited in keeping family together and safe, and helping them overcome obstacles (Bowen, 1999; Byrskog et al., 2014). The strength of WoRB helped them move to the host country and adapt to their new environment (Chung et al., 2013; El-Radi, 2015). WoRB indicated that their strength was derived from their faith (Bowen, 1999), their upbringing with parents never saying, ‘I can’t do this’ (Byrskog et al., 2014), and their past experience of surviving traumatic events (El-Radi, 2015). WoRB also indicated that positivity, positive self-talk, a positive mindset, and optimism influenced their resiliency (Abraham et al., 2018; Chung et al., 2013; Gakuba et al., 2015; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012). WoRB expressed positivity looking forward, knowing that their life would be better and different in the host country (Abraham et al., 2018; Chung et al., 2013; Nashwan et al., 2017; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012). Positive self-talk also helped WoRB manage their distress (Moio, 2008; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012).

Being patient was a personal characteristic which allowed WoRB to ‘hold on’. Patience came through persistence and perseverance and was demonstrated via tolerance and acceptance of their situation (Hales, 2003). Independence, self-empowerment and a sense of direction were also conceptualised as helping the WoRB become resilient (Denzongpa & Nichols, 2020; Moio, 2008; Mrayan, 2016; Nashwan et al., 2017; Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). These personal characteristics

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helped WoRB grow as individuals, uproot gender orientated norms, and were influenced by new opportunities within the family (Mrayan, 2016; Nashwan et al., 2017) and wider community (Denzongpa & Nichols, 2020), which provided WoRB with a sense of pride and kept them motivated to engage in new activities (Moio, 2008).

Personal characteristics are emphasised in a number of the theoretical frameworks (Nussbaum, 2000; Ungar, 2011). However, it is important to highlight that these theoretical frameworks emphasised that personal attributes alone were not enough when conceptualising resilience, providing further support for the notion that resilience is a multi-dimensional construct, and that there is a shift away from the concept of resilience being a purely personal attribute.

### ***3.3.7. Formalised support***

WoRB identified formalised supports as contributing to their resilience. WoRB identified that education, often funded by the government, was an instrumental factor in helping them adapt, succeed and take on leadership roles in their communities (Chung et al., 2013; Denzongpa & Nichols, 2020). Access to formalised support, such as healthcare, provided by the government was also integral for resilience, as a majority of their financial resources were depleted coming to their host countries (Chung et al., 2013). NGO's enhanced WoRB's resilience via access to resources, such as language support and mental health education, which helped them adjust to their host countries. NGO's also helped WoRB establish connections to build their personal assets, a supportive network and a safe space for socialising (Chung et al., 2013; Holscher et al., 2012). Overall formal supports provided hope (Chung et al., 2013), and strength to cope (Abraham et al., 2018).

Similar to social support, formalised support is a factor accounted for in a large number of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks (Hobfoll, 2001; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Norris et al., 2008; Nussbaum, 2000; Ungar, 2011). In these frameworks, formalised support is conceptualised as a resilience supporting asset, which WoRB can utilise to assist them. Furthermore, several theories emphasise the importance of considering not only if these resources are available to the individual, but if they are available at the right time (Ungar, 2011).

## **4. Discussion**

The current review aimed to synthesise research focusing on factors which contribute to resilience in WoRB and the associated theoretical frameworks used within literature. In regard to the factors which have been endorsed by WoRB as contributing to their resilience, religion and connection to culture were endorsed not only during the flight stage (period of leaving one's country) of their refugee journey but also in the resettlement phase (the process of associated with settlement following arrival in the host country). Likewise, their children, family connection and social support were all endorsed factors as contributing to their resilience. Within this, it is important to highlight that the WoRB indicated that their culture of origin was a key factor in explaining why their children and family were so pivotal in their resilience, in which strong links to family and the sense of pride they derived from raising their children stemmed from their culture of origin and traditional values (Sossou et al., 2008; Welsh & Brodsky, 2010). These further

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highlights how imperative it is to consider culture when researching resilience in refugee populations.

In regard to the theoretical frameworks utilised in research investigating resilience in WoRB, this review identified that although several previously applied theoretical framework could account for multiple factors endorsed by WoRB as contributing to their resilience (i.e., personal attributes and external resources), none seems to adequately accounts for a majority of the factors. For example, religion was the most commonly endorsed factor contributing to resilience in WoRB in the included studies and could arguably be accounted for indirectly in a number of the frameworks. However, the frequency of its endorsement brings into question if it warrants more explicit recognition within resilience frameworks applied to WoRB.

It was also identified that only a few theoretical frameworks considered culture as a factor impacting on how resilience is conceptualised and developed. This can be identified as a significant limitation, as culture was not only frequently endorsed as a stand-alone factor contributing to resilience in WoRB, but was also identified as an justification linking, and explaining, why other factors were endorsed, such as family, social support and their children. In addition to this, the majority of frameworks were developed in line with the hegemonic Western understanding of resilience and individuals who live in, and identify with, Western individualistic cultures. The application of theoretical frameworks which were originally developed for Western populations to refugees has been identified as a major confound within research, as resilience theories derived from Western conceptualisations typically focus on individual and relational factors as defined by Western cultures, and lack recognition of community and cultural factors (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010). For example, Western resilience frameworks which focus on family resilience (which accounts for several key factors (children and family) endorsed by WoRB as contributing to their resilience) may not be appropriate to apply to research investigating non-Western cultural groups. This is because a Western conceptualisation of family differs from many non-Western conceptualisation, with many Eastern cultures defining family as including extended family, and not only parents, children and siblings (Shishehgar et al., 2017). This difference in the definition of ‘family’ makes it difficult to apply to a non-Western culture despite accounting for an endorsed factor which contributes to resilience. Overall, the current review supports the emerging argument that research investigating resilience in refugee populations needs to move towards a more culturally grounded approach, in which research focuses on understanding how resilience is understood in refugee populations, what factors they see as contributing to their resilience, why, and how they interact (Yotebieng et al., 2018). In doing this, it increases the likelihood of developing a deeper understanding of resilience in a non-Western context (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010).

The results of the current review need to be interpreted with consideration of several limitations. This review was limited to research written in English and located via an electronic database search. Therefore, it is possible that literature investigating resilience in WoRB was missed. Furthermore, the cumulative number of WoRB included in the current review is small ( $n=408$ ), with individual studies having small sample sizes (ranging between  $n=1$  and  $n=60$ ). However, small sample sizes are not uncommon in qualitative research, particularly IPA, which the majority of the included studies utilised (Tang & Dos Santos, 2017), with qualitative research more commonly aiming to gain in-depth explanations and meanings, rather than generalisable results (Carminati, 2018). The review itself could also be critiqued as it did not take into consideration the differences between specific cultural groups identified within the included studies, despite arguing that culture is an important factor which needs to be given more consideration within

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resilience research. Instead, this review investigated resilience factors endorsed more generally across WoRB. General investigations can be identified as holding utility, particularly in regard to informing policies and programs to support WoRB during resettlement, as it is very difficult for services to tailor programs to specific cultural background. For example, the identification that religion is an endorsed factor associated with resilience in WoRB from a range of cultures suggests that this is an important factor to consider when supporting WoRB, including during the selection of a resettlement location (i.e., does that location have a place of worship associated with their religious affiliation) and during resettlement support (i.e., do they know the location of a place of worship, if religion is identified as an important factor for that individual).

The current review also has a number of theoretical and practical implications. First, the results of the current review highlight the need for greater consideration to be given when utilising a resilience framework developed for Western based populations in research involving refugee populations. This is because the framework may not capture vital factors which influence resilience, such as culture, resulting in an inaccurate understanding of resilience in refugee populations. Within this, future research would benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of 'resilience' as defined by refugee populations (Yotebieng et al., 2018). This will increase the conceptual clarity of the term, and assist in the development of a culturally applicable resilience framework (Béné et al., 2014). Gaining a greater understanding of resilience, as defined by refugees, and developing a culturally applicable framework may also result in beneficial practical implications, as it may provide services supporting refugees with more applicable interventions to increase refugee wellbeing and resilience. This is imperative, as it has been identified that at times refugees felt the services accessible to them actually impeded their ability to achieve wellbeing and undermined their resilience (Yotebieng et al., 2018). It should also be noted that a number of the factors identified as contributing to resilience in WoRB, have also been identified as sources of distress. For example, although WoRB identified their children as a factor contributing to their resilience, studies have identified that children often acculturate at a faster pace than WoRB, which can result in an intergenerational gap and increased distress (Tsai et al., 2017). This further supports that notion that resilience is not a stable construct, but rather a multidimensional and fluid construct which requires a large degree of adaptability. It would be beneficial for future research to investigate how WoRB adapt and cope when factors can be both a source of distress and resilience, simultaneously.

The findings of this review highlight the need for research investigating resilience in WoRB to place a larger emphasis on culture, as it was not only endorsed as a major contributor to their resilience, but also as a justification behind other endorsed factors, such as their children's future and connection with family. It was also identified that future research should aim to develop a culturally applicable framework for research investigating resilience in not only WoRB but the refugee populations as a whole, as many of the current frameworks utilised to align with the Western conceptualisation of resilience.

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## Appendix

**Table 2. Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Qualitative Appraisal of Included Articles.**

Author	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Rating
Abraham et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Baird et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Bowen	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Byrskog et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Carranza	U	Y	N	N	N	N	N	U	U	U	Low Quality
Chung et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Clark et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Denzonpga et al	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	Y	U	Medium Quality
Darychuk et al.	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Dubus	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
El-Radi	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
Gakuba et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	U	Y	Y	Medium Quality
Hales	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Holscher et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	High Quality
Lenette et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Maung	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Moio	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Mrayan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Munt	Y	U	U	Y	U	U	Y	U	U	Y	Low Quality
Nashwan et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality

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Pearce et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Pham	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Phan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Ross – Sheriff	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Sesay	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Sherwood	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Smit et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Sossou et al.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	U	Y	Y	Y	High Quality
Vesely et al.	Y	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	Y	Y	Low Quality

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Note: Q1= Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? Q2 = Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? Q3= Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? Q4 =Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? Q5= Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? Q6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? Q7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? Q8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? Q9. Is there a clear statement of findings? Q10. How Valuable is the Research? Y= Yes. N=No, U= Unclear/Cannot Tell.