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The Trail of Courage: A Mini-Ethnographic Case Study Exploring the Feasibility and Acceptability of Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) on Yazidi Adolescent Girl Wellbeing

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THE TRAIL OF COURAGE: A MINI-ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE
FEASIBILITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF INTEGRATED EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY
(IEAT) ON YAZIDI ADOLESCENT GIRL WELLBEING

by

Kari F. Eller

A THESIS

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THE TRAIL OF COURAGE: A MINI-ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE
FEASIBILITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF INTEGRATED EQUINE-ASSISTED THERAPY
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Kari F. Eller, M.S.

University of Nebraska, 2019

Adviser: Yan Xia

In 2018, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Nadia Murad, a Yazidi woman who captured the attention of the world with her story of survival from the combatant and abusive hands of ISIS. Murad used her voice to speak out against wartime sexual assault and in doing so, has supported the wellbeing of women and girls around the world. A Goodwill Ambassador, her example and work has visibilized their trail of courage and lifted up the importance of work to support their wellbeing. This research, in albeit a very small way, seeks to follow Murad's path. Though literature abounds on the concept of wellbeing, there is a dearth in literature on wellbeing from the Yazidi perspective. Through a rigorous secondary analysis of program data, this mini-ethnographic case study contributes a rich understanding of wellbeing according from the Yazidi adolescent girl perspective, identifies protective factors supporting their resilience, and evaluates the feasibility and acceptability of the Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) framework. Results from this study have implications for the practice of and policy surrounding equine therapy as well as complementary support services for Yazidi adolescents in the United States and abroad. Additionally, findings may serve to further the knowledge base on Yazidi adolescent wellbeing and on the use of IEAT in work with Yazidi and other adolescent survivors of trauma.

Dedication

To resilient women, the world over who have touched my life and the lives of countless many—
thank you. Your spark is hope and your love, contagious.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In community, we find the courage to do extraordinary things. It is by faith that I have come this far and through the support of my community that I have had the courage to keep moving forward. From design to analysis and beyond, it has been the wisdom, patience, and guidance of my advisor, professor, thesis chair, and the secondary investigator of this study, Dr. Yan Ruth Xia, which have carried me throughout the journey of this research. At times, when the daunting character of the process seemed overbearing, she instinctively knew just what I needed to hear. Her advice has been invaluable to me and has made me a stronger researcher. Throughout the study, I was also blessed with the kindness and support of Dr. Michelle Howell Smith, one of my professors and research team member of this study. Her insights and perspectives helped me to discover new ways of analyzing the data from angles and depths I did not originally consider. She provided me with an exemplary model to follow and gave me encouragement beyond expectation as I worked to develop new skills. Additionally, this thesis would not be what it is without the support of my thesis committee, Dr. Julie Tippens and Dr. Maria Rosario de Guzman. I am grateful for their willingness to share from their knowledge and personal experience in the field. Their constructive suggestions throughout the process challenged me to take the research to the next level and enriched its sections with their expertise. Dr. Wayne Babchuk and fellow classmates in EDPS 900K: Qualitative Approaches to Educational Research, were also an instrumental part of this study. I am appreciative of all the questions asked, comments provided, resources shared, and positive feedback. They helped me to see the importance of clear research design and to think deeply about its implementation.

It was the dedication and openness to new ideas of my equine therapy colleagues, Kari Hoeft and Justy Hagan, that made this dream a reality. They gave selflessly of their time, talents, and resources, more often than not, for the price of even just a smile. Along the way they also helped me in my own personal resettlement to bridge past with present and in the process became dear friends. The Equine Encounters Program would not be as solid in the community without the support of program partners. Amanda Godemann, Jenn Worley, Sara Gilliam, and countless equine therapy volunteers supported the girls in this program, in its beginning and continue to do so, even today. Their time, efforts, and connections set the program into motion and bridged the gaps—expected and unexpected. In the spirit of a very wise Brazilian pedagogue and theorist, Paulo Freire, everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn. Without any previous or little experience with horses, many Yazidi adolescent girls and their families, took a risk on this program. They came every week, spent time getting to know us and the horses, and taught us many things about who they are and their culture from one session to the next. It has been an honor to get to know them and I pray for their continued wellbeing and that of the Yazidi community.

Office time spent together, late night text messages, and writing time with graduate student friends also provided me with companionship and renewed strength. Jessie Peter, Fabianne Tavares Gondim, Marie Dutra Gross, and Malinda Powell shared many of these moments with me, taking random breaks for food, fun, and fits of laughter. I will cherish these times for years to come and I look forward to many more as we continue our studies together. Although not listed, there are many students from the Child, Youth and Family Studies graduate cohort that have also played a role in my academic development. Their thoughtfulness and advice have meant a great deal to me.

Most importantly, I would also like to thank my family, Justin Eller and Everette Eller Fisher. Their constant love and support are the reasons this thesis is even a possibility. They have been there for me through thick and thin, cheered me along, and constantly reassured me of my ability to make a valuable contribution to the field. Words do not suffice to share just how much I love them. To list all the ways in which I counted on them throughout this process would be, in and of itself, another thesis. I am eternally grateful for their ability to understand me, to help me infuse concepts and thoughts stemming from life together in other countries into my work, and to dream with me about new opportunities and life plans for the future. When all feels lost, they remind me of what's important in life and with even just a hug, my world becomes right again. Even from afar, I also counted on the listening ears and cookie-baking gifts of my mother and father, mother- and father-in-law, brother and his family, and sister-in-law and her family. These amazing people and the love I continue to feel from them, inspire me to keep going.

Last but not least, to my church family and friends around the world, I thank you for your accompaniment, example, and encouragement “to act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly...” (Micah 6:8). It is because of a desire to do good work with you that I try to stand up and speak out for issues of social justice and equity, even when the road is hard. Thank you, everyone!

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Chapter One: Introduction

Adolescence is a time period marked by distinct developmental and health needs as well as rights. It is the time in which youth grow in their capability to regulate emotions, assume additional responsibilities and roles and begin to gather a repertoire of specific knowledge, skills and abilities (WHO, 2017). In short, adolescence sets the stage for adult wellbeing and outcomes in life (Bonnie, Stroud, & Breiner, 2015). However, trauma is a major disruption on adolescent development with far-reaching and long-lasting effects (Adams, 2010; Listenbee et al., 2012; Ford, 2007).

Yazidi adolescent girls have faced and/or experienced inconceivable trauma. The on-going genocide of the Yazidi people marks the 74th in their history and has been compared to the Holocaust (Enslar, 2016). Those who were captured and escaped tell stories of being separated from their families or forced to watch the murder of the loved ones, tortured, forced to marry, raped, sold, used as sex slaves, forced to have unnecessary surgery, forced to convert to Islam, and worse (Dearden, 2017; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2016). Others who were lucky enough to escape without being captured, still fled for their lives leaving behind people, places and things that they knew, lived in refugee camps where conditions were less than optimal and continue to face the on-going trauma of news from back home while they work to resettle in their new country, a stressful process in and of itself (UN News Service Section, 2017; Starr, 2017).

Though mental health services are currently provided by many public schools in the United States, the reality is that funding is limited and not all who need services are able to receive care or the amount of care required (Anderson & Cardoza, 2016). With this understanding and the collective knowledge and experience of a larger network of psychologists,

therapists, counselors, etc. who work with adolescent refugees, The National Trauma Stress Network (NCTSN, 2003) makes the case for culturally-competent and wrap-around services. It suggests that mental health support be a community agenda, with multiple modal treatment approaches for at-risk youth between families, schools and their communities to more adequately address their complex needs and provide a more comprehensive service.

Equine therapy is rehabilitative in nature and shows promising results as an integrative and complementary therapy for the treatment of traumatic stress with youth. Combining participant needs and goals with equine-assisted activities and riding, it offers participants an opportunity to achieve a greater sense of wellbeing (Naste et al., 2017). Studies have found equine therapy to have an array of physical benefits, including positive associations with postural alignment, coordination, and corporal balance (Baek & Kim, 2014; McGibbon, 1998); social benefits, including positive associations with socialization and peer/authority/parental relationships (Alfonso, Alfonso, Llabre & Fernandez, 2015; Guerino, Briel & Araújo, 2015; Trotter, Chandler, Goodwin-Bond & Casey, 2008); psychological benefits, including positive associations with emotional system regulation, the abatement of sense of inadequacy/anxiety/depression/attention problems/somatization, and overall positive associations with subjective wellbeing and hope (Frederick, Hatz & Lanning, 2015; Mueller & McCullough, 2017; Kaiser, Spence, Lavergne & VandenBosch, 2004; Boshoff, Grobler & Nienaber, 2015).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to develop a rich understanding of what constitutes wellbeing according to Yazidi adolescent girls following refugee resettlement and how Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) impacts their wellbeing. Pilot data from this study will serve as a baseline for future work with this population and will influence IEAT

curriculum development. Data from this research may also contribute toward establishing the IEAT method as a complementary therapy for the treatment of adolescents who have been exposed to trauma and/or who experience traumatic symptoms and begin the growing body of knowledge on the use of equine therapy with refugee populations. To evaluate IEAT impact holistically, secondary data include instructors' observations and reflections; volunteer observations and reflections, participant reflections, pictures, a participant focus group discussion, and a supporter (i.e., parents, caseworkers, mentors) focus group discussion.

Key Terms

Adolescence. Between the ages of 10 and 19, adolescence prevails the Yazidi girls participating in IEAT, and therefore, it is considered an important factor in the IEAT curriculum and research design. Though, there may be differences in the understanding of what adolescence is and how it is treated among cultures and over time, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) recognizes it to be a time in between childhood and adulthood. Regardless of how a culture defines adolescence, it is a time in which specific knowledge, skills, abilities and personal character are developed, children grow in their capability to regulate emotions and begin assuming additional responsibilities and roles. During adolescence, there are also distinct developmental and health needs as well as rights. Endocrine changes (i.e., changes in hormone levels) spurring physical changes, may affect adolescent relationships with peers and their loved ones (Patton et al., 2012) and may be influenced by internal family factors like malnutrition and external factors such as stress (WHO, 2017). Societal changes (i.e., differing norms and values, access to social media) also are factors at play in adolescent health. Additionally, adolescents' ability to successfully adjust to social conditions during times of transition may be attributed to changes in their socioemotional developments (Crone, 2012).

Most importantly, with the knowledge that slow, albeit progressive changes can occur in the brain as a result of neuroplasticity (Sharma, Classen, & Cohen, 2013), a focus on interventions to counteract previous negative events or traumatic experiences in adolescence may prove worthy of researcher attention (WHO, 2017). Current studies have explored cost-benefit analysis of investment in adolescent healthcare and have presented strong justification for interventions to strengthen adolescents during their years of transition into adulthood (McDaid et al., 2014; Stenberg et al., 2014).

Wellbeing. Over the years, researchers have plodded forward, developing many measures to better understand and advance the concept of wellbeing. These instruments principally take either a hedonic (i.e., pleasure, happiness) or eudaimonic stance (i.e., realization of human potential) to define and measure the “the good life” for target populations. With wellbeing understood as an umbrella term to describe an individual’s experience and/or psychological functioning, there has been much debate in the research community as evidenced in the instruments themselves; each with a different bent on what should be included and each attempting to put forth the best definition (Ryan & Deci, 2001). While hedonic wellbeing has drifted from and expanded on the concepts of maximum pleasure, pursuit of human appetites, mental and bodily preferences, subjective happiness and wellbeing, and life pleasantries (Kubovy, 1999; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999; Diener & Lucas, 1999), eudaimonic wellbeing has also seen the focus shift to consider the constructs of: positive criteria of mental health, psychosocial stages, life satisfaction, fully functioning people, maturity, self-actualization, personality changes, fulfillment of life, positive and negative affect, prosocial behaviors, and more (Fromm, 1981; Waterman, 1993; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Vescovelli, 2014). These two branches of wellbeing have at times and to differing degrees

both converged and diverged, with factors such as culture and world views challenging their theoretical underpinnings and the generalizability of their empirical results. How wellbeing is defined influences how policy is written, and programs are developed, along with a slew of other implications all with the intent to better individual, family and societal life (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Though wellbeing is a transversal issue of importance to all nations, research continues to examine participants based on a predefined notion of wellbeing that may or may not fit their societal and cultural worldviews. Therefore, findings on wellbeing without a solid understanding of how its participants define wellbeing may lead to the development of programs and policies that are not significant for its intended population. For this reason, this study seeks to contextualize wellbeing according to the perspective of Yazidi adolescent girls participating in IEAT to more adequately measure and reflect its impact.

Refugees. All Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the IEAT program are refugees or the children of refugees, who have experienced varying degrees of complex and cumulative trauma. Refugees are defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (USA for UNHCR, 2017) as people who due to differences in “race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” are forced to flee to another country due to a justified fear of persecution, violence and/or war. They are considered an at-risk population which encounters significant economic, cultural and social disadvantages” (New, Guilfoyle & Harman, 2015). In comparison to internationally displaced persons (IDP) refugees are protected under international law (i.e., the Geneva Convention of 1951) against refoulement and granted access to social rights, protection, and assistance, similar to the rights granted to nationals of their host government (UNHCR, 2015). In 2016, the number of refugees recorded crossing international borders in search of safety was more than 22.5 million people, half of which are

children (Edwards, 2017). According to the UNHCR (2017), categories of refugees who are considered vulnerable include: women, girls, and children who are at risk, survivors of violence and/or torture, people who are in the family reunification process and who have medical needs.

Gender-based violence. Around the world, women and children compose the largest percentage and are considered the most vulnerable group of refugees in the world¹. As a result of gender-based violence, women refugees are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress and exhibit more PTSD symptoms than men (Bachay & Fernández-Calienes, 2010). Yazidi girls captured by ISIS in 2014 over the age of eight years old were subject to gender-based violence including sex slavery, rape, forced marriage, and worse. Those under the age of eight often were witnesses to gender-based violence against other girls, friends and family members. They were particularly vulnerable in that their safety and survival was often linked to the cooperation of the other girls and women who suffered at the hands of their ISIS captors. Even if they did not personally suffer gender-based violence by ISIS, many Yazidi girls lived with the fear of this reality and continue to be haunted by stories told by friends, family members and girls who escaped (UNHCR, 2016).

Resettlement. For Yazidi and other refugee families, resettlement is never as easy as the flight from their country of asylum to the United States. After fleeing the country, individuals and families go through a lengthy process to be declared a refugee by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to international law, a request for resettlement in a third country, such as the United States is only made once their return to their country of origin or continuation in their country of asylum is determined unfeasible. Eight

¹ According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017), a child is anyone under the age of 19 unless otherwise stipulated by national law. With this understanding, adolescence is also considered under the broader term of childhood in many reports and documents.

percent of the refugee population is in need of resettlement, however, regardless of the country requested, less than one percent of refugees are resettled. (UNHCR, 2017).

The resettlement process following their assignment to the United States involves multiple steps that typically take anywhere from 18-24 months to complete, including: collection of demographical information from a resettlement support center, security checks by the State Department and/or law enforcement and intelligence agencies, further collection of data (i.e., fingerprints and photographs), an interview with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), DHS approval of U.S. admission criteria, medical screening by the International Organization for Migration or a U.S. Embassy physician, assignment to a U.S. sponsoring agency, cultural orientation, a second interagency security check and finally, case review from a Customs and Border Protection officer upon their arrival at a U.S. designated port of entry (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2017). In the United States, upon their arrival, non-governmental organizations continue to provide support for refugees during the first 90 days including housing, and programs to support their cultural adjustment and self-sufficiency. After this period, there are number of programs that they may be eligible for within the next five years, but these programs are not guaranteed (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Under current U.S. administration, the ceiling on the number of refugees to be resettled for the fiscal year in 2018 was lowered to 45,000 and this year is set for 30,000 (Wroughton, 2018), a dramatic low compared to the 110,000 cap from 2016 (Rose, 2017; Davis, 2017). This process of resettlement in and of itself may contribute toward the mounting acculturative stress experienced by refugees and their families.

Yazidi. Yazidis, also Yezidis, Daasin, or Ezidi (Hafiz, 2014), are one of the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia originating from communities that are today considered part of Iraq,

Syria, Turkey, Armenia and Georgia. Although there continue to be Yazidis in these countries and others throughout the world, 74-genocidal campaigns by fundamentalists and other events since the twentieth century have caused mass emigrations (Yezidi Truth, 2015; Lind, 2014). The vast majority of Yazidis are now concentrated in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq, in and around Mount Sinjar and in the Nineveh Plains (Yazda, 2015). However, the Yazidi's continued forced migration and the genocide currently occurring (UN News Service Section, 2017), make population estimates difficult to obtain. Sources differ in the numbers presented, ranging from 500,000 to 700,000 today (Henne & Hackett, 2014).

Language. Most Yazidis speak either a dialect of Kurdish (i.e., Kurmanji/Ezidiki, Sorani, Horami), Aramaic or Arabic or some combination as their native language. Different regions within the Kurdistan area have different dialects. Depending upon the region, some dialectical differences in Kurdish, such as those between Kurmanji and Sorani or Horami, have been explained to be as different as Spanish and German (Yezidi International, 2015). Yazidis lived under “repressive state authorities” and associated formal schooling in many areas was linked with threats of religious conversion and not being able to speak their language. Additionally, their culture is mostly oral, and many Yazidi women also worked in the fields to support their families. For these reasons, illiteracy is high among Yazidi women (Otten, 2017; Masiel, 2017).

Religion. For centuries, Yazidis have been persecuted and killed because of their religion. As such, they have become a closed community, not allowing anyone to convert to Yazidism and rarely marrying outsiders (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). The Yazidi contend that their religion, Yazidism, is the oldest in the world, dating back 3,000-4,000 years (Yazda, 2015). Yazidism blends characteristics of Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism, yet it does not follow an Abrahamic tradition (Jalabi, 2014). They believe in a transcendental God who created seven

great angels, the leader and first of whom, is Tawsi Melek (YezidiTruth.org, 2011)². Yazidism is monotheistic and non-dualistic, believing in the practice of reincarnation but not subscribing to concept of hell (Hafiz, 2014). Yazidis follow a “rigid religious caste system,” the head of which is the Baba Shiekh, considered as important as the Pope. However, he is subordinate in all matters to the Mîr or the Yazidi prince, Tawsi Melek’s official representation to all Yazidis (Yezidi International, 2015).

At the center of Yazidism is the fallen Peacock Angel, Melek Tawwus, whom God returned to heaven and serves as an intermediary between Yazidis and God (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). Most of their teachings are passed down through oral tradition, although there are two sacred texts, the Kitab al-Jilwa or the “Book of Revelation,” and the Mishefa Reş or the “Black Book.” The holy city of Lalish is the home of the Yazidi sanctuary where their reformer, Sheikh Adi, is entombed. There, Yazidis baptize their children, make pilgrimages seeking assistance and ask for blessings. Throughout the year, Yazidis practice four religious holidays, the: New Year, Feast of the Sacrifice, Feast of Seven Days, and Friday of December Feast (Yezidi International, 2015).

Genocide. Yazidis have been persecuted throughout history (Yezidi International, 2015). The most recent genocide is estimated to have displaced 90 percent of the community living in Iraq (Yazda, 2016). On August 3, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), swept across the Tel Hamis region in Syria and the northern region of Iraq, home to the largest population of Yazidis, a people ISIS considers infidels (UNHCR, 2016). Though there is no way

² Other common spellings of the name of the Peacock Angel include but are not limited to, Melek Tawwus (Jalabi, 2014), Melek Taus (Hafiz, 2014), Tawsy Melek and Tawûsê Melek (Yezidi International, 2015).

to specifically calculate the number of people who were affected, within a matter of days, approximately 3,100 Yazidis were either beheaded, killed by gunshot, burned alive or died from starvation, dehydration, or injuries. Roughly, another 6,800 Yazidis were disappeared, families were separated, enslaved, tortured, sold, raped, used as sex slaves and child soldiers, transferred against their will to other cities and countries, forced to convert to Islam, and suffered from other unimaginable atrocities, thousands of whom still remain in captivity (Dearden, 2017). The United Nations has mandated an international inquiry against these crimes and called for steps to be taken in the direction of justice and rescue (UN News Service Section, 2017). More than three years after the Yazidi genocide, over 3,410 Yazidis continue to be either unaccounted for or in captivity (Callimachi, 2017).

Yazidi resettlement in the United States. The 2014 genocide and events surrounding it have led many Yazidis to flee in search of asylum, living on the streets, schools, refugee camps and anywhere they can find shelter in Iraq and in neighboring countries such as Turkey and Syria as well as in Europe (Yazda, 2015; CNN, 2016). There, many have applied for refugee status and resettlement to a third country such as Canada, Germany and the United States (CBC News, 2017; Whyte, 2017; Palacios, 2017). With estimates at population numbers totaling to around 3,000, the largest Yazidi community in the United States is located in one Midwestern state. As the years progress, they are slowly working to rebuild their lives and have taken steps to making it their permanent home (Palacios, 2017).

Equine therapy. Equine therapy is a general term used to refer to numerous types of therapy with horses which have evolved over the years. All types of therapy are based on a participant's interaction with horses for the purpose of fulfilling a particular goal or expressed need, though the goals and type of interaction vary depending on the therapy chosen. Equine-

Assisted Therapy (EAT) is rehabilitative in nature, catering activities with horses or in the equine-environment to work toward participant's needs and medical concerns. Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy (EFP), blends the mental health needs and goals of a participant with equine activities under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional who works in collaboration with or also is a trained equine professional. Hippotherapy, uses equine movement to help participants reach physical, occupational and speech-oriented goals as a part of an integrated treatment plan. Therapeutic driving teaches participants how drive a cart with a horse or pony to achieve a greater sense of wellbeing. In particular, it provides an option for participants who have restrictions on their physical abilities (i.e., the use of a wheelchair) and other difficulties (i.e., mental, sensory and emotional) which severely challenge their ability to participate in other forms of therapy with horses (Smith, 2017; AHA, 2017).

Benefits. Equine therapy has been found to have extensive physical, social and psychological benefits. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to list all the benefits involved, however, examples of the benefits from studies with empirical data follow. Baek and Kim (2014) found that equine therapy was more effective in improving the muscle asymmetry in stroke patients' abdominal muscles than typical trunk exercises. Guerino, Briel, and Araújo (2015) discovered that hippotherapy improved the postural alignment, coordination, corporal balance, sociability and self-esteem of women who were sexually abused. McGibbon (1998) found that after an 8-week hippotherapy intervention, children with spastic cerebral palsy, experienced a significant decrease in energy expenditure and increase in gross motor functions (i.e., walking, running and jumping). Mueller and McCullough (2017) found significant decreases in post-traumatic stress symptomatology (i.e., self-reported intrusion, avoidance, and arousal symptoms) in children and adolescents ages 10– 18 over the course of a 10-week Equine-Facilitated

Psychotherapy (EFP) program. Kaiser, Spence, Lavergne, & VandenBosch (2004) discovered equine therapy to have a significant effect on reducing children's physical aggression, improving their peer relationships, and relationships with authority, after only five days of therapeutic riding. Alfonso, Alfonso, Llabre and Fernandez (2015) found that Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) in combination with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy significantly reduced the social anxiety of women, ages 18-29 years old over a period of six weeks. Trotter, Chandler, Goodwin-Bond and Casey (2008) found significant improvement in many areas such as emotional symptoms, sense of inadequacy, relationship with parents, externalizing/internalizing problems and adaptive skills Equine-Assisted Counseling (EFP) to work with at-risk children and adolescents over a period of 12 weeks. Frederick, Hatz and Lanning (2015) discovered that EAL significantly decreased at-risk adolescent depression and increased hope after a 5-week intervention. Boshoff, Grobler, and Nienaber (2015) found that EAT significantly improved problem and emotion-focused coping as well as subjective wellbeing of African at-risk adolescents after an eight sessions intervention.

Significance of Study

Even though equine therapy has existed for decades, a need for more comprehensive research with integrative methods has been expressed (Kemp, 2014). This study will contribute toward the growing body of knowledge on the effects of equine therapy and in an area where there is a significant gap in research. While studies on the use of animal therapies with refugees and the importance of animals in refugee lives exist (Every, Smith, Smith, Trigg, & Thompson, 2017; Riggs, Due, & Taylor, 2017), searches for research of equine therapy with refugees, to date, have not yielded any results, despite the fact that it is occurring in various parts of the world (Huncar, 2015; AFP, 2016). It is hoped that the dissemination of the findings from this study,

will spark a trend in equine therapy research and programs with refugee populations and generate interest in contextual definitions and measurements of wellbeing to better therapeutic services and care. Furthermore, publication and presentation of this study will place for the consideration of the equine community a new, integrative method, one which joins forces to better participant outcomes and which considers teamwork among equine instructors and disciplines, not only beneficial but essential.

Testimonies and research have made it clear that trauma takes generations to heal (Yehuda et al., 2016; TEDx Talks, 2017). Given its intergenerational impact, there is a vital need for mental health services that provide not only short or fixed-term individual options but also more family-based palliative care. It is hoped that through this and future research, the building of a case can be made so that equine therapy becomes a viable option, covered by insurance for refugee and other families affected by trauma.

Study Context

This study takes place in a preferred refugee resettlement community of a Midwestern state. Refugees resettled in the state include individuals and families from countries such as Iraq, Bosnia, Sudan, Thailand, Tajikistan, China, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Mexico, among others. There are between 250,000-500,000 residents in this community of the Midwestern state with a refugee population of 10,000-30,000 (WPR, 2019; RPC, 2019).

Positioning

Living abroad for seven years, I experienced what it was like to live in a new country with different cultural norms, values and ways of living. It was a roller coaster of an experience with high, highs and low, lows. Appreciating the experience, for what it was, has made me a stronger person and I am beyond blessed for the friends and family I have made in the process.

There were times when all I needed to keep going was a good cup of coffee and a friend. There were other times, when the acculturative stress of living between, in and out of multiple cultures, took a toll on my personal mental health and wellbeing. During those times, more than anything, I just needed to be outdoors and better yet, with animals, another being that would respond to me but not ask me questions. I needed to relieve the stress and tension that I literally felt in my body by doing something that required me to be physical (i.e., jog) and to give myself and my mind a break (i.e., mosaic work). These activities were grounding and renewing. Simultaneously, family members, prayer and resilient women around the world and from the cultures where I resided, helped me to not only survive but thrive and in their presence, I was reminded that I was not alone and that I was loved. Only after I interacted in these ways could I put words to emotions and process how I felt.

My experience was one of privilege. I am a white woman who voluntarily chose to live among people that I now consider my family and neighbors. I did not flee my homeland for my life. For the most part, my family members are still where I left them, and I have not known what it is like to live in the precarious conditions for years on end that many refugees face. In no way do I pretend to understand the plight of refugees. However, I do know what it is like to live in another country and I have gone through the immigration process in two other countries myself as well as in the United States because of my son. As a result, I believe in the long welcome and in hope. These experiences for me have made me want to form part of a support network that helps others, especially women and children in the stages and processes they face while adjusting to life in a new country. If somehow in the refugee resettlement process I may be of support, then I am honored to do so.

Horses were a large part of my childhood and adolescence. This study, for me, is a connection of my past, with my present research, and an area in which I foresee a part of my future career, refugee resettlement. I am a founding member and instructor at Horses for Healing: Equine Therapy and Research Center and simultaneously, a UNL graduate student in the Child, Youth and Family Studies Department. Being a HFH instructor allows me the opportunity to develop a relationship based on trust and mutuality with the participants. This relationship is seen as an advantage for the purpose of research as participants will feel more comfortable sharing with an “insider” versus someone they do not know. To keep my role as an instructor distinct from my role as a researcher, participants will be recruited for research only after the Equine Encounters Program has concluded.

My lived experiences have led me to be an equine therapy instructor and to conduct the evaluation study. This study represents elements of the ways in which I have personally felt supported throughout my life through mind (e.g., mental engagement), body (e.g., movement), and spirit (e.g., reflection) connection and through the support of the community (e.g., strong women), although I recognize that this combination may not work for others. Having said this, I think it offers a unique possibility and one worthy of research and testing. In conducting this study, I will attempt to maintain an awareness of my bias to evaluate the program through my personal experience of working with horses. I recognize that doing so may skew the research in favor of only my own views and that to more fully understand the phenomena occurring, it will be essential to ground the findings in the words and experiences of the participants and their supporters. Regardless of the study’s findings, I am grateful for the opportunity that it provides to highlight potential areas of need and the voices of refugees, a population I feel called to work alongside and support.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the literature surrounding the topics of trauma and acculturative stress, the Yazidi adolescent girl experience, equine therapy, and wellbeing. Discussion of trauma flows from how categorizations and paradigm shifts have led to a developmental and life cycle orientation in the understanding of and mental health support provided to trauma survivors. Emphasis is then placed on how additional daily stressors caused by clashes in cultural differences, changing life conditions and new contexts (Mena, 1987), further complicate the integration of refugees into their country of resettlement. To gain perspective of the plight of Yazidi adolescent girls and contextualize the need to provide them with psychological support, documented accounts and testimonies highlight what many experienced during pre-flight and flight journeys. Concluding chapter two, a detailed description of IEAT, including its standards and relationship with the Situated Learning Theory (SLT) and Community of Practice (CoP) bring forth its potential to provide an integral service to improve the wellbeing of Yazidi adolescent girls. The chapter ends with information on the Equine Encounters Program and the conclusion, leading to the research questions.

Trauma

Humans are “wired” to handle small amounts of stress over short periods of time. However, when stress becomes chronic and toxic in nature, it can cause damage to the immune system, impede and impair memory and negatively affect social relationships and self-regulation. Explicit memories are the tip of the iceberg so to speak for experiences that are extremely stressful, however, implicit memories, or the memories stored in a person’s unconscious memory system can also wreak havoc on a person’s life in the present. Conditions such as war, violence and discrimination in a person’s environment and context are the breeding grounds for stressful

situations and traumatic experiences (Walsh, 2012). Trauma is categorized into four different types, according to severity and chronicity.

Type I traumas are based on a single episode that threatens the environmental and/or interpersonal safety of the individual or that of others. In such a situation, the individual experiences feelings of helplessness, horror and fear. Associated symptoms include pervasive thoughts and images, avoidance of event reminders and physiological arousal (Kira, Fazwi and Fazwi, 2013; McLean, 2013).

Under Type II trauma, individuals are exposed to multiple and diverse traumatic events that take on an “invasive, interpersonal nature” with far reaching and lingering effects (NCSTN, 2003; Humphreys & Tsantefski, 2013). In difference to Type I, Type II has been found to have a significant impact on how individuals react daily on a psychological and physiological basis (McLean, 2013). This difference may impact their ability to communicate with others, fulfill family obligations and roles (i.e., a parent who cannot help a child to process traumatic experiences because they are processing their own), acquire a new language and form attachments. The latter of which, has been linked to negative effects on behavior, education, employment and in some cases, has been found to be an indicator of future criminal activity (Humphreys & Tsantefski, 2013).

Type III trauma is invoked at an early age by repetitive, invasive and violent events that occurred for years (Solomon and Heide, 1999). In this category, events were so coercive that individuals may have “alterations in memory and consciousness, frequently including dissociation; emotional numbing; major developmental deficits; poorly developed, often fragmented, sense of self; a core belief that he or she is fatally flawed and has no right to be alive; a sense of hopelessness and shame; trust issues that interfere with normal relationships;

and no concept of a future.” Complex trauma that is on-going adds a yet another layer as a person’s response to fear becomes their new normal. In this category, development losses and deficiencies are linked to psychological symptoms.

Type I traumas can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Type II traumas in complex PTSD, Type III, in more serious symptoms such as suicide, comorbid syndromes, disassociation and hearing voices, and Type IV, in the combination of all previous types of trauma occurring over the lifespan of a person. This trauma type includes traumas that are direct, secondary, tertiary, and beyond, having been induced by parents, caregivers, other individuals, and the trauma victims themselves, as well as societal betrayal and malfunction. It covers disorders that are connected to developmental and attachment-related trauma, complex PTSD, comorbidities, depression, and suicidal ideations and attempts (Kira, Fazwi & Fazwi, 2013).

Over the years, traumatology has experienced several paradigm shifts in how it understands trauma and its effects. With each shift, a deeper understanding and more comprehensive view of trauma has emerged: the psychiatric, the psychoanalytic/developmental, and the shift toward a focus on “discrimination, genocide and torture.” In the psychiatric shift, survival types and post-traumatic stress disorder dominated the agenda. The psychoanalytic and developmental shift, turned attention to the effects of trauma on early childhood and later in life, looking specifically at attachment disruptions, child maltreatment and betrayal. The third shift, however, explored how macro and micro aggressions played out in systemic, interpersonal and intergroup contexts.

The Developmentally Based Trauma Framework (DBTF) suggests viewing trauma and mental health through a bidimensional (horizontal and vertical) and integrative lens instead of subscribing to one paradigm shift or another (Kira, Fazwi and Fazwi, 2013). To do so, it

proposes a dialogue between all the different types of trauma to consider the complex and cumulative effects of trauma on the life of an individual or group of people from a developmental and life cycle perspective. The horizontal dimension covers attachment and human-induced traumas looking to how they impact identity in the personal, collective, role and physical sense. The vertical dimension shows degrees of severity and references time of traumatic events considering, for example, intergenerational trauma by families or macro systemic experiences that cause collective trauma. This framework looks at trauma cumulatively as does Trauma Type IV, however, it also takes into consideration the developmental stages of the trauma survivor and intergenerational effects.

With an understanding of the different types of trauma, it is possible to say that many refugees, as a result of war, violence and persecution experience Type II, III or IV trauma. Looking to the DBTF can provide great insight into a more comprehensive view of refugee trauma to include the effect of their pre-flight, flight and resettlement processes during a specific developmental time period of their life. As well, it is helpful to think through possible implications of their cumulative trauma throughout their life cycle both in the present and future.

Acculturative Stress

For refugees, trauma is not the only factor working against their ability to thrive in their resettlement country. After resettlement into another country, refugees experience acculturative stress or stress provoked by their adjustment to cultural differences in values, changing life conditions and new contexts (Mena, 1987). These changes provoke shifting thoughts and expressions of identity, attitudes and feelings causing conflict and change in behavior as their culture of origin clashes with their culture of adoption. This is often the case when refugees, who are from collectivistic cultures are resettled into individualistic countries (Lewig, Arney,

Salveron & Barredo, 2013). Acculturative stress may be manifested in many forms such as anxiety, depression, marginality, anger, loss of appetite, fatigue/loss of energy, search for identity/meaning, general confusion, and psychosomatic symptoms (Lee, 2004; McLaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013). The degree to which it is manifested in refugees is moderated by their experience of trauma, ongoing racism, discrimination, intergenerational conflicts and dismantled relational/kinship networks, among others (Berry, 1987; Lee, 2004; Torres, 2012). Acculturative stress, contributes stressors, which combine with trauma in the ever-growing list of challenges refugees must navigate daily.

Yazidi Adolescent Girl Refugee Experience

Since the genocide in 2014, an estimated 7,000 women and girls were sold at auction to ISIS fighters (Bradford, 2017). As of June 2016, approximately 3,200 remain in captivity. Whether the Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the program were safe during this most recent or even a previous attack, trauma resulting from genocides, has impacted their community both directly and intergenerationally. Reports on the day of the attack in 2014, explain that Yazidi women were separated from men and adolescent males (12 years old and above). The males who refused to convert to Islam or who were caught with weapons were killed often in front of the women and children or just out of sight where they could hear what was happening. In some cases, men who converted to Islam were separated from their families and in others, they were reunited with their families in a different location. Even after being reunited, Yazidi women and girls who were unmarried or without children were regularly seized. Yazidi women and children (including adolescent girls) who were left without male family members were taken to different “holding sites.” In one case, older women were separated from the rest and executed. At holding sites, living conditions were inhumane and the women testify to overcrowding, being

held in locked rooms, having to drink water from toilets, eat food riddled with insects and suffering from no access medical care, except for gynecologists who confirmed their virginity (UNHCR, 2016).

Girls were forced to give up all possessions, registered (i.e., name, age, village, marital status, number of children, photographs taken, etc.) and taken from site to site for purchase or gifted. Only girls ages 8 and under were allowed to stay with their mothers; a separation that was done by sight. Girls ages 9 and up were taken from their mothers. They report hiding and trying to injure themselves to be less attractive as well as attempting and watching some commit suicide. They were taken one after the other forcibly as slaves, at times in groups of 50 to 300 or more to slave markets, beaten, forced to parade for ISIS fighters and hold their own for sale sign indicating their price ranging from a few dollars to \$1,500. They were treated like property being sold and later resold for a larger profit. They endured physical torture, sexual slavery, daily and in some cases, gang raped. These rapes may or may not have happened in front of their children. If they did not comply, their children suffered and/or were killed (UNHCR, 2016).

Some of the women and girls were given pills and injections for birth control while others were not. There are varying reports from women and adolescents who had children in captivity, ranging from being allowed to keep their children to giving or having them taken away to the death of these children caused by inadequate access to medical care. Yazidi women and girls were forced to work in their captors' houses doing domestic chores like washing clothes and cooking. ISIS had rules which prohibited them from being sold to non-ISIS members and there were also rules governing the sales. If they were sold back to their families, their price ranged from \$10,000-40,000 USD. Women and children who escaped or were bought back by their families live with from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and other mental health

challenges. Many have considered, attempt or committed suicide and require psychosocial support (UNHCR, 2016).

Yazidi women and children who were not captured, fled for their lives as ISIS fighters shot at them, their friends and family. Many fled to Mount Sinjar, taking little with them, where they were surrounded by ISIS fighters and trapped in extreme heat without sufficient access to medical care, food or water. Those who escaped often ended up in refugee camps mostly in Turkey, Iraq, Greece and Syria (Yazda, 2015; Starr, 2017; Carstensen, 2016) for at least 18 to 24 months³ where conditions were again, less than optimal (UNHCR, 2016). In several situations, Yazidi refugee families were even forced to relocate from one refugee camp to another (Bozarslan, 2017).

Many of the Yazidi refugees who were abroad before the genocide occurred or who fled, received phone calls of distressed and panicked relatives with news of their loved ones or maybe worse, no phone call at all (Bradford, 2017). Though some Yazidi adolescent girls were sheltered from these and previous events, testimonies and research have made it clear that trauma has an intergenerational impact (Yehuda et al., 2016; TEDx Talks, 2017). Yazidi refugees who resettled into the United States, whether they have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), another mental health concern or nothing at all, have been exposed to extreme violence, war, and persecution. Their pre-flight, flight and resettlement to the United States was in and of itself a complex process that has taken a toll on their lives. The DBTF (Kira, Fazwi & Fazwi, 2013), also reminds us that to view this trauma not only as complex and cumulative but through

³ This is the typical time referenced for an asylum seeker to be designated a refugee and assigned to a third country (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2017). Some refugees may also find themselves in protracted situations, or situations where they are stuck indefinitely “in limbo” between countries (Jalabi, 2014).

the eyes of the developmental period of each refugee. For Yazidi adolescent girls, trauma (direct or intergenerational) is riddled with many physical, social, mental and emotional changes. The effects of cumulative, complex and on-going trauma affect their present and future, making it harder for them to not only survive but thrive. For Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing, culturally competent support must be provided in a variety of domains and using an array of approaches (Humphreys & Tsantefski, 2013).

Providing psychological support. Despite great resilience, trauma leaves traces on our minds and emotions and “the body keeps the score” (van der Kolk, 2014). Simply removing an individual from an unsafe environment is not enough; psychological support must be provided. The United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (Gorna, 2015) clearly state and provide empirical-based evidence for a focus on women’s, children’s and adolescent’s health, claiming that it will provide “at least a 10-fold return on investment.” Although, for many, a stigma attached to receiving therapeutic care may deter participation (Reist, 2017; Harvey, 2012). Additionally, many western therapeutic approaches used to treat non-western survivors of trauma ignore the impact of culture on trauma, trauma reactions and treatment. For example, western treatments tend to focus on helping an individual and in doing so, ignore collectivistic cultural values at play (Baldachin, 2010). However, research agrees that support for trauma survivors is necessary and that what will work best for each individual varies (NCSTN, 2003; Cloitre, 2015). Historical and current treatments for trauma survivors include but are not limited to the following western and non-western approaches: Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), Brief Eclectic Psychotherapy (BEP), psychopharmacotherapy, Stress Inoculation Training (SIT),

Present-Centered Therapy (PCT), Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT), Limbic System Therapy, Cultural Family Therapy, Post-Traumatic Psychocultural Therapy (PTpsyCT), mindfulness training, group therapies, psychosocial rehabilitation, hypnosis, resilience training, and traditional healers (Solomon & Heide, 1999; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2017; ISTSS, 2017; Baldachin, 2010).

After years of experience in the field, the National Child Stress Trauma Network (NCSTN, 2003) makes the case that benefits to an individual are maximized when services are comprehensive, wrap-around and culturally competent. Droždek (2015) echoes this concept and contributes that therapeutic services should be multimodal to best attend to trauma survivors. Cloitre (2015) furthers this discussion, explaining that a “one size fits all” approach for providing services to trauma survivors does not maximize the benefits nor does it take into consideration survivor treatment preferences.

Culturally competent services acknowledge and respect participants’ cultural values, thus creating safe environments. These services are able to blend causal and professional approaches, in a non-threatening way where participants feel free to connect socially and to learn. Culturally competent practitioners approach service provision from a strengths-based understanding and design services to meet the needs and goals of the participants. This does not mean that practitioners are seen as the experts, but rather facilitators who are willing to lend their knowledge base, skills, time and wisdom to accompanying an individual as they work toward achieving identified goals. For practitioners to be viewed as culturally competent, they must spend time getting to know the individual seeking support, actively listen and work to develop a relationship based on mutuality (Warr, Man & Forbes, 2013; Mclaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013;

Arney & Scott, 2013). Returning to the strengths-based part of this equation, services provided by culturally-competent practitioners, must also work to bolster participant's protective factors.

Protective factors have been defined as the conditions, buffering mechanisms or key processes, and resources that aim to improve an individual's reaction and ability to adaptively function in the face of a stress producing situation (Dalla, DeFrain, & Johnson, 2009; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000; Walsh, 2012). To survive and thrive in adverse situations, individuals, families, and communities all rely upon protective factors and the factors they employ to face their particular crisis vary depending on their "values, resources, challenges, and aims." Hence, the list of protective factors is more of a dynamic list, evolving over time and context. Interventions designed to strengthen protective factors have been found to reduce levels of stress and vulnerability, empower families, and increase their resilience (Walsh, 2012). It is with this knowledge that elements from a variety of protective factors are utilized in IEAT curriculum.

Yazidis have faced complex, cumulative, and intergenerational trauma. Providing wrap-around services that bolster their protective factors may also positively influence their wellbeing. The Yazidi genocide is not over and as a result, they continue to experience traumatic stress at the same time that acculturative stress occurs in their countries of resettlement. Yazidis live in a communal culture and given that their trauma is individually, and collectively rooted, western models of therapeutic support may appear to be a foreign concept and confusing. This is not to say that they are ineffective but rather that a more culturally competent approach must be undertaken in their use. Therapeutic support must also be expanded to include non-western therapeutic approaches and consider multimodal possibilities (Mohammadi, 2016). Finally, the extreme circumstances of the Yazidi adolescent girl have left many in a position where telling their story may be too painful and/or the words to do so sometimes cannot be found.

Incorporating services that focus on a mind-spirit-body connection may gain ground where other therapeutic approaches fall short (Mohammadi, 2016; van der Kolk, 2013).

The school district the Yazidi girls of this study attend has obtained funding and has worked to provide therapeutic services for immigrant populations suffering from trauma. They have also taken great strides toward ensuring that they are culturally competent (Reist, 2017). In collaboration with the New Americans Task Force Mental Health Subcommittee, an additional grant was also secured in July 2017 to provide cultural sensitivity training for bilingual interpreters among other mental health areas, such as the “training of 20 mental therapists in trauma therapy, including exposure therapy” (Jenkins, 2017). However, the demands for therapeutic services outweighed the number of cases the district was able to serve, and therapeutic services offered in the school district sought to treat trauma directly with students (Reist, 2017), an approach which could be complemented by other non-western and multimodal approaches, like equine therapy to serve and reach an even larger number of students.

Equine Therapy and Wellbeing

Equine therapy has been used as both a sole and complementary therapeutic service (Brandt, 2013) and has been found to support various aspects of wellbeing including: adults suffering from trauma (Yorke, Adams & Coady, 2008), social anxiety in young women (Alfonso et al., 2015), at-risk youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties (Burgon, 2011), adults suffering from PTSD symptoms and anxiety (Earles, Vernon & Yetz, 2015), adaptive functioning in at-risk youth (Frederick, Hatz & Lanning 2015), children and young women suffering from sexual abuse (Guerino, Briel & Araujo, 2014; Kemp et al., 2013), anger in children (Kaiser, Spence, Lavergne & Bosch, 2004), adults in psychological distress (Klontz et al., 2007), treatment of complex trauma in youth (Naste et al., 2017), adolescents’ basal cortisol

levels (Pendry, Smith & Roeter, 2014), and depressive symptoms in children, adolescents and adults (Signal, Taylor, Botros, Prentice, & Lazarus, 2013). These studies and others show promising results in the ability of equine therapy methods (Equine-Assisted Learning, Equine-Assisted Therapy, Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy, hippotherapy, and therapeutic riding) to support the wellbeing of individuals, however, to date, these methods tend to function mostly in isolation, as siloes, rarely working collaboratively to maximize benefits for participants. Each offers a plethora of benefits and their potential combination, a unique, new methodology that can be customized to maximize participant benefits.

The Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) method takes this combination yet one step further by integrating other practices into equine therapy (i.e., yoga stretches, mindfulness components, and prosocial behaviors) which have been found significant in work with trauma survivors and adolescents (van der Kolk, 1994; Daud, Klinteberg & Rydelius, 2008). Working individually with horses allows for a more personalized experience, however, doing so at the same time as others creates a shared experience. Time before and after sessions are also dedicated in IEAT to strengthening relationships among participants and with instructors. IEAT encourages family members/caregivers to also accompany participants, providing additional support. Though IEAT is a type of therapy and elements of psychotherapeutic activities are included, the main focus is on developing a relationship between participant and horse in community and as such, it creates a learning environment that is not only deemed acceptable but of interest to many refugee adolescents.

Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT). The IEAT method, was developed by instructors from the non-profit organization, Horses for Healing: Equine Therapy and Research Center (HFH) in collaboration with yoga instructors and university professors to be used as

either a sole or complementary therapy. It seamlessly blends equine-assisted learning, therapeutic riding, groundwork activities, equestrian reflection, and mindfulness techniques to promote participant wellbeing and resilience.

In particular, it was developed with trauma survivors in mind. It is unique in that its focus is not to use the horse specifically to psychologically process trauma nor does it limit services provided to accomplishing a specific set of goals (i.e., speech, physical, occupational). Rather, it is a method in which participants' relationship with horses is seen as the therapy, the horses are understood as the therapists, and the instructors, the facilitators. As facilitators, instructors act as relationship interpreters, accompanying both participants and horses as they journey through this process together, working to create a safe environment. Creating a safe environment means that at all times, participants' safety is the first consideration (i.e., all riders are required to wear helmets, horses' cinches are checked at least twice throughout the lesson, etc.) as well as allowing them to interact with the horse in a way that they feel comfortable (e.g., they are given the option to trot and they cue the horse to do so).

Throughout the IEAT, the horse-participant relationship develops from one of unfamiliarity and maybe even fear to one characterized by mutual communication and acquaintanceship. The development of this relationship advances from one session to the next with the support of the instructors who work to appropriately challenge participants to advance in their relationship with their horse. With the theoretical understanding that knowledge is constructed in community, participants also advance in their relationship through reflection, sharing with one another about their experiences and interactions. As they grow in their competency of the relationship, participants begin to realize how this competency is linked with

more complete engagement and collaboration. This awareness is then connected to its application in their lives at home, school and in their communities.

Horse-participant relationship. Though each participant and/or group of participants may have identified goals, IEAT seeks to assist a person through the process of learning how to handle and ride a horse. It recognizes that to work with horses, a relationship between the horses and participants must be established and that to do this, participants must draw upon their strengths as well as confront and learn to navigate many of the challenges they face. From one session to another, the relationship grows in complexity, beginning with simple encounters and ending somewhere along a continuum that leads to advanced riding skills.

To gain a horse's trust and to accomplish any type of task or work with horses, a person must enter into a relationship with them in which mind, body and spirit connect; a common understanding among those who work with and ride horses (Hayes, 2015; Pike, 2009). To do so successfully, a person's thoughts must be translated into their actions and emotions expressed. Horses are herd animals and over the years for survival, have developed an uncanny ability to reflect and quickly respond to emotions. A person who is extremely nervous, for example, can make a horse nervous, even if that horse by nature is calm. This makes performing any task with horses more difficult and to accomplish the task, the participant has to learn how to better manage their emotions and to reassure the horse of their safety (Smith et al., 2016; Davis, 2016; Hayes, 2015; The Anxiety Treatment Center, 2017).

Simultaneously, a person must learn to not only be mindful about how he or she is being experienced by the horse but also quickly learn how to read and listen to the horse's needs and communication. For example, when riding a horse and their ears are pointed out to the side, they are focused on what they are being asked to do. However, when their ears point ahead, their

attention turns in the direction of an area of concern or interest and when they are pointed completely backward or pinned, it is a warning sign of their anger. On the opposite side, a horse, though trained to respond to specific cues, must learn to respond to slight differences in these cues from different riders and learn how much of a cue to give a rider to communicate needs. For example, a horse that pins back ears but that does not get a response may choose to swish his or her tail as an additional indicator of an action that is not well-received (Williams, 2013). All of the above descriptions require both horse and participant to get to know each other and establish both positive routines and rituals over time. While many suggestions may be made to facilitate the process of building a relationship between participant and horse, in the end, this relationship cannot be taught. Rather, it is one constructed through trust, mutuality and shared experience. In IEAT, therapy is optimal when participants develop a deeper relationship with horses. Although some participants with physical limitations may not be able to perform all or the same activities as participants who are able-bodied, this does not mean that they are not able to experience growth in their relationship. It simply means that what the relationship looks like for them is distinct and should be measured accordingly.

Connecting community. Through individual and shared activities with horses, IEAT participants slowly integrate into the equine community, spending time with each other, instructors and equine volunteers. In the IEAT methodology, prosocial behaviors are encouraged both during and following their experience. Participants who have completed the program, are given an opportunity, should they desire, to assist with future programs for new participants being side walkers, horse leaders and groomers. To strengthen participants' communities, IEAT also invites their family members, care givers, mentors, etc. to accompany participants throughout their program as much as they are interested and/or able.

Theoretical framework: Situated Learning Theory (SLT) and Community of Practice (CoP). In Situated Learning Theory (SLT), Lave and Wenger (1990) posit that genuine learning takes place through collaboration and social interaction in authentic activities which are embedded in a specific context and culture. In the learning process, individuals slowly move from a peripheral stance in the community to an involved one at its core. Through learning, they become part of a Community of Practice (CoP). CoPs are described as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 1998). To be a CoP, a community must have a domain that requires commitment, practice this domain and build mutual relationships in which they can learn from and with each other.

IEAT takes place in a distinct context from everyday life (e.g., a riding facility, outdoor trails, stables). Though each rider works individually with a horse, they do so at the same time as other riders and through the support of IEAT instructors. Time before sessions and after sessions are spent with these individuals, creating a space for relationships between participants, instructors, and volunteers to further develop. With IEAT, participants begin with initial encounters with horses on the ground and as the program progresses, they develop a more profound relationship with them leading up to advanced riding skills. Specific activities within IEAT require participants to collaborate and problem-solve together. Through reflections, participants construct knowledge about working with horses in community, learning from their own experiences as well as that of their peers.

Equine Encounters Program Description

The HFH Equine Encounters Program is based on the IEAT method and designed specifically for Yazidi adolescent girls. It occurs over a period of eight contact hours with each

session lasting for a total of two hours. During the sessions, participants interact with horses through activities, such as grooming, saddling, leading, riding, performing patterns/completing obstacle courses, playing games while horseback, going on trail rides, etc. Activities are designed to help foster the horse-participant relationship by establishing both routines and rituals with horses in community.

At the end of each session participants are asked to reflect as a group on the experience. Detailed plans for each session may be found in Appendix F, however, these plans are considered emergent and adaptive to needs of the participants in any given moment. All activities within the sessions described below are linked to strengthening participants' protective factors to increase their resilience. The goal of all sessions is for participants to "be more in the moment," consciously thinking about and reflecting on the message they are communicating with their horse through their thoughts, actions and energy as well as being more receptive to the message being communicated to them by their horse.

For all sessions, participants will be accompanied by three HFH instructors and three to six volunteers per lesson as needed by program design. The volunteers will interact with the participants per instructor request. To be a volunteer, individuals must demonstrate an ability to work with horses and to communicate well in English. HFH ensures that at least one volunteer present is a former participant of the Equine Encounters Program that speaks Kurmanji in order to provide current participants and their parents with English assistance during sessions.

Session one. During the first session, participants present themselves to the group and then later to the horses. Instructors, volunteers, and horses are also presented to the participants. Discussion is begun about nonverbal communication with horses. Participants then learn about the process of grooming, saddling, and leading horses, following which, they perform a pattern

(e.g., walk from cone A to cone B and stop) on the ground. As a group, they later practice mounting and dismounting horses. Once everyone has practiced, participants take turns riding around the arena at a walk. While one participant rides, performing stretching exercises (e.g., reach toward the ceiling while taking a big breath in and exhale as your arms go down), the other participant is a reassuring presence, placing her hand on either the rider's ankle or lower leg for stability. Concluding the session, participants are shown how to untack a horse, given treats to share with the horses, eat snack themselves, reflect on the experience, and spend time leisurely with instructors, volunteers, and the horses.

Session two. For the second session, participants play introductory games, continue discussion on nonverbal communication with horses, and are then matched with a horse based on their personality and other considerations (e.g., horse weight limit). Participants greet, groom, saddle, and mount their assigned horse. After initial stretches, the group practices basic commands (i.e., walk, stop, turn) on horseback, and plays a game with their assigned horse reinforcing the commands learned. During this session, participants also begin to incorporate elements of pattern work (e.g., the bridge) and perform two-step patterns. Concluding the session, participants take a short trail ride outside, switching half-way through with their volunteers. Winding down the session, participants help untack the horses, give treats to the horses, eat snack themselves, reflect on the experience, and spend time leisurely with instructors, volunteers, and the horses.

Session three. In the third session, participants play a get-to-know you game with instructors and volunteers. They then review nonverbal communication with horses, greet, groom, saddle, and mount their horse. During initial stretches, participants are invited to close their eyes, after which, the group plays a review riding game, learns how to neck rein, and then

plays a variety of games (e.g., basketball, ring toss, turn in the box) per their choice on horseback. Participants are provided with instructions on how to trot and assisted throughout the process. After participants are comfortable with trotting, they play a game to practice the skill with the objective of increasing their independence at the trot. Following this practice, participants are allowed to ride independently at a walk with minimal support around the arena, either revisiting games or practicing skills learned. Winding down the session, participants help untack the horses, give treats to the horses, eat snack themselves, reflect on the experience, and spend time leisurely with instructors, volunteers, and the horses.

Session four. For the last session, participants are provided with extra time for greeting, grooming, and saddling their horses during which, they take turns riding at a walk bareback on different horses with the support of instructors and volunteers. If participants feel comfortable, they are invited to close their eyes while bareback and later trot for a few strides. Once each participant has had an opportunity to ride bareback, they proceed to mount and perform initial stretches and a riding warm-up on their assigned horse. A quick pattern including trotting is performed by participants following which, all participants take a longer trail ride together outside. Returning to the arena, participants untack, give treats to their horses, and work together to paint a different horse based on how they feel at the end of the program. After the horse has been painted, they work together to wash it outside, spending time leisurely outside with the entire group. Winding down the session, participants reflect on the experience and eat snack.

Program protocol. To participate in the program Yazidi adolescent girls and a parent/legal guardian must attend the HFH information session. During this session, participants receive information on the program, have a chance to ask questions, and fill out all required HFH paperwork. Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the program are involved for a total of 18

hours (1-hour information session, 16 hours programming including travel time to and from the HFH facility, 1-hour celebration event) spanning a period of 1.5 months. Parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are required to participate for a total of 2 hours (1-hour information session, 1-hour celebration event), spanning a period of 2 days. Parents and others supporting them (e.g. caseworkers, mentors) are not required to attend sessions, though they may choose to do so at any time throughout the program. Equine instructors are involved in the program for a total of 26 hours (1-hour information session, 24 hours programming, 1-hour celebration event) spanning a period of 1.5 months. HFH does not pay an interpreter to assist with program sessions but invites former Yazidi adolescent girls who participated in the Equine Encounters Program to be volunteers for other groups. These volunteers assist participants in the case that language assistance is needed. Transportation to and from the HFH facility is arranged by parents, instructors, and/or a community-based human services organization. At the end of the program during the celebration event, food is shared, program certificates are awarded, a photobook with pictures from the experience (funded by HFH) is gifted, and a discussion is held to reflect on the program experience.

Summary

Trauma, whether direct or intergenerational, is an invisible threat with serious implications for Yazidi adolescent girls. Culturally competent therapeutic services are provided for Yazidi adolescent girls by the public-school system. However, their focus is on treating trauma directly and a need for additional services outside of school has been expressed (Godeman, 2017; E. Eedo, personal communication, November 10, 2017). Though research has found equine therapy beneficial for many different populations (e.g., at-risk youth, children survivors of sexual abuse, adults living with cerebral palsy), studies on its effects with refugee youth, particularly the Yazidi youth population, have yet to be published and little is known about how the IEAT method affects them. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Yazidi adolescent girls define wellbeing and also what aspects of the Equine Encounters Program work to bolster their protective factors and increase their resilience.

Research Questions

As an initial step toward a rich understanding, this study asks the following questions:

Overarching question. Following refugee resettlement, how does Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) influence Yazidi adolescent girls' wellbeing?

Questions.

1. How do Yazidi adolescent girls define wellbeing from their cultural perspective?
2. What are the protective factors Yazidi adolescent girls attribute to their wellbeing?
3. How does IEAT support the development of protective factors identified by Yazidi adolescent girls as central to their wellbeing?
4. How do key stakeholders (e.g., parents, case workers, mentors) perceive the influence of IEAT on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing?

Chapter Three: Methods

Whether born in the United States or newly arrived, Yazidi refugee adolescents have been exposed to or experienced trauma (UNHCR, 2016). This trauma has occurred during a time period of their life characterized by many developmental changes and is on-going (World Health Organization, 2017; NBC News, 2017). Acculturative stress also takes its toll on wellbeing (Berry, 1987; Lee, 2004; Torres, 2012) and when the three combine, there is even more of a critical need to provide Yazidi adolescents, especially girls, with additional support beyond what is offered in schools (Humphreys & Tsantefski, 2013; Reist, 2017; Drożdżek, 2015; NCSTN, 2005). Though equine therapy has been used with refugees (Huncar, 2015; AFP, 2016), to date, research has yet to be published. Furthermore, culturally competent models tailored and/or designed to support refugee wellbeing have yet to be in many cases developed, much less tested. This initial study will explore the effect of the IEAT on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing and begin building a knowledge base on its use with refugee populations and trauma survivors.

Study Design

This study employs an ethnographic case design (Storesund & McMurray, 2009), a combination of mini-ethnographic and case study research. Ethnographic research looks for ideational patterns within the mental activities (e.g., ideas, behaviors expressed by action) of a particular culture-sharing group (Fetterman, 2010; Wolcott, 2008). In ethnographic research, the investigator is often involved in group activities, spends extended time in the field, and interviews participants. Ethnographies consider both emic (i.e., participant) and etic (i.e., program staff) perspectives to develop an overall understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A mini-ethnography focuses in on a specific phenomenon or an area of investigation in order to better understand cultural values, norms, and roles at play according to a

remembered experience, rather than one which is lived (White, 2009). As such, mini-ethnographic research does not require as much time to complete, ranging from several weeks to a year or less (Storesund & McMurray, 2009). This time frame is possible because data saturation may be obtained through integration with case study design (Fusch, 2013).

Case study research is built on a constructivist paradigm which views truth as subjective and dependent on varied experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies are understood to be a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014). They may be used when four basic conditions exist: [1] questions of “what” and “how” are asked [2] the manipulation of participants’ behavior is not an option [3] the contextual conditions are pertinent to the phenomenon and [4] the boundaries between the real-life context and the phenomenon are blurred (Yin, 2014). Case studies involve extensive data collection over multiple sources in order to describe in detail and analyze the phenomenon within the bounded system (Stake, 2005).

Ethnographic case studies are therefore defined to be “case analysis of a person, event, activity, or process set within a cultural perspective” (Creswell, 2012). They combine research designs to off-set the strengths and weaknesses of the other, allowing investigators to “generate as well as study theory in real world applications” (Fusch, 2017). Mini-ethnographic case study research follows this same understanding and achieves data saturation through its adherence to a specific phenomenon or area of investigation that is bound by both time and place (Fusch, 2013).

This mini-ethnographic case study research centers around the culture-sharing group of Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the Equine Encounters Program, their cultural concept of wellbeing, and the influence of Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) on their wellbeing. This research is bound within the Equine Encounters Program, which was developed using the

IEAT framework. It is delimited by its programmatic time frame and locations. In this study, each girl participating in the Equine Encounters Program is treated as a different unit contributing toward the presentation of a single case. The phenomenon or case considered is the wellbeing of the Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the Equine Encounters Program. It will use an exploratory design (Yin, 2014) provided that there is no information available on the influence of IEAT on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing and that there is little information on what constitutes wellbeing from the Yazidi perspective. Through the detailed descriptions of participant feelings, familiarity, and bonding during each programmatic session, Yazidi adolescent girl cultural values, norms, and roles associated with wellbeing in the program are revealed. These descriptions express the emic and etic perspectives of participants, instructors, volunteers, and their supporters, triangulating data types and sources to depict the IEAT experience in its entirety.

Participants and Recruitment Procedures

This research includes two groups of people: four Equine Encounters Program participants, representing 100% of the August 2018 cohort and three people who support them (e.g., parent, caseworker, mentor). Program participants included in the research attended and completed all four Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) sessions. All supporters (e.g., parents, caseworkers, mentors) included in the research regularly interacted with program participants and were not related to one another. Research participants represent 25% of the total number of participants/supporters for the 2018 Equine Encounters Program. Both program participants and their supporters predominately speak Kurmanji/English.

Program participants were ages 11, 11, 12, and 16 and all were born in the United States. The four program participants were extended family with two sets of sisters. One set's mother

was the sister of two of the other participants. The three participant supporters were unrelated but knew each other well. Supporter ages were 31, 31, and 32 and all were female. Their length of time spent respectively in the United States was 31 years, 2 years, and 17 years. The first two supporters are employed full-time and work second jobs as well. One holds a high school degree and the other a bachelor's degree. The last supporter works part-time and is part-time college student.

All participants from the August 2018 cohort were recruited in collaboration with Horses for Healing: Equine Therapy and Research Center (HFH), the developers of the Equine Encounters Program. HFH granted permission to recruit participants for the purpose of research following the celebration event which concludes their programming (See Appendix B). Consent was obtained on the evening and location of the Equine Encounters Program celebration event. The celebration event consisted of three agenda items: sharing food, the certification ceremony, and group discussions. Following the certification ceremony, I explained the research to both groups of participants with the assistance of an interpreter (Kurmanji/English) recommended by a community-based human services organization (see Appendix C, D, E), answered participant questions, and obtained written consent/assent. Participants then took a 10-15-minute break before group discussions began.

Data Collection

Prior to commencing research, approval was obtained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) to ensure research compliance with ethical standards (Appendix A). This research uses secondary data. Participants were not asked to do anything outside of normal program activities. Research uses this same information as well as information from collected throughout each session for secondary analysis on wellbeing.

Secondary data collected are used to glean insight into the research questions of the current study [1] How do Yazidi adolescent girls define wellbeing from their cultural perspective? [2] What are the protective factors Yazidi adolescent girls attribute to their wellbeing? [3] How does IEAT support the development of protective factors identified by Yazidi adolescent girls as central to their wellbeing? [4] How do key stakeholders (e.g., parents, case workers, mentors) perceive the influence of IEAT on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing? and the central question, [5] Following refugee resettlement, how does IEAT influence Yazidi adolescent girls' wellbeing?

Secondary data. Secondary data stem from the program itself and documents participant feelings, familiarity, and bonding throughout each programmatic session.

This data set includes intake documents (participation forms), documents collected after each equine session (observations, reflections, pictures), and audio recordings (focus group discussions). Program documents collected after each of the four equine sessions include three instructors' observations and reflections, three to six volunteers' observations and reflections, four participants' reflections, and pictures documenting the entire experience. Audio recordings include a four-person participant focus group discussion and a three-person supporter (i.e., parents, caseworkers, mentors) focus group discussion reflecting on the entirety of the program and activities regarding what makes a day the best collected during the celebration event.

Analysis and reflection of these multiple data types and sources make it possible to reveal the participant experience in their entirety, over time.

Examples of reflection questions following each session for instructors are:

1. How would you say each of the girls interacted with their horse today?
2. What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

Examples of reflection questions following each session for volunteers are:

1. How did the girl that you worked with do today?
2. What is something that you will remember about today?

Examples of reflection questions following each session for participants are:

1. What will you tell someone else about today's session?
2. How does it feel to work with a horse?

In the discussion group following the celebration event, Equine Encounters participants began by describing their best day ever. After each participant had a chance to share, they worked together to find and synthesize commonalities among all of their experiences. The group then responded to questions about their perception of the program activity.

Examples of guiding questions for the participant discussion include:

1. Think about your favorite activity from the program. How does it relate to the categories on the wall?
2. Think about an activity that was hard for you. How did you work through it?

In the supporter (e.g., parent, caseworker, mentor) discussion group following the celebration event, participants were asked to describe the Equine Encounters participant before and after the program sessions. They also responded to questions about what participants shared with others about the program, what they believe helps participants to have a really great day, and their overall perception of the program.

Examples of guiding questions for the supporter discussion include:

1. What did participants do/say/act like before and after going to the barn for a session?
2. What have you or would you tell others about this program?

Confidentiality of data. All documentation for this study is electronic and stored using Box, computerized housing approved for safe guarding research data by UNL. Data collected do not use participants' names and identifying information is confidential. In the data analysis, identifiable information has been removed to protect participants' privacy. All electronic documents will be destroyed through deletion from the Box folder three years from the completion of the study. Data collected are only accessed by the primary investigator, secondary investigator, and one other research team member approved by the IRB.

Data Analysis

Ethnographic case study analysis follows a five-step process, including [1] data management [2] reading and memoing emergent ideas [3] description and coding/theme development [4] interpretation [5] representation. This upward spiral approach, continually circles analysis from the observational descriptions of data into detailed analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the first stage of data analysis, audio recorded discussions in English were transcribed by me verbatim to become more familiar and immersed in the data (Seidman, 2006). During the transcription process, notes were taken on thoughts generated from the audio recordings (Richards, 2009). MAXQDA software (2018) was used to organize all of the data into files as they were received (e.g., one file for instructor reflections from the first session, one file for participant reflections from the first session). In the second stage, all data collected were reviewed in its entirety. Initial thoughts arising from the data were also noted and reviewed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Chapter four presents the third phase of data analysis. It begins by providing a general description of each data section (e.g., sessions, participant commonalities) from the review of program documents. Description allows readers to understand, “just the facts, carefully presented” and is foundational for ethnographic research (Wolcott, 1990). Data description is combined from multiple data types and sources, providing a holistic view of each section and allowing participant cultural values, norms, and roles at play to emerge naturally. Using MAXQDA software (2018), each description from the data collected is then expanded through provisional coding results. The chapter begins with a general description of each IEAT session, enriched by insight and vivid quotes gleaned from the provisional coding of the Equine Encounters Program principles, such as bonding. Next, a general description is provided of [1] participant commonalities identified (e.g., spiritual) [2] connections participants drew between

the commonalities [3] description of supporter elements discussed. From the comparison and synthesis of these three descriptions, new categories of protective factors were generated, such as interconnectedness (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). To improve rigor and credibility, these new categories of protective factors were explored with the assistance of a member from the research team approved by the IRB. This process also led to the operational definition of wellbeing. All data were then coded provisionally according to the new categories of protective factors and the section supported through insight and vivid quotes of their observance in the program.

In the fourth phase of data analysis, Equine Encounters Program codes (e.g., bonding) and new categories of protective factors generated from the study were compared, contrasted, and synthesized to answer the research questions. The analysis begins by responding to each of the four supporting questions, leading to the interpretation of the overarching question on the influence of IEAT on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing. Verbatim quotes interspersed throughout the analysis strengthen responses to questions in the words of Yazidi adolescent girls themselves.

In the fifth and final phase of data analysis, findings from the study are then compared and contrasted to findings from broader literature, completing the spiral approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The written analysis includes an opening vignette, a description of session results, an explanation of the protective factors of wellbeing, and the synthesized influence of Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing.

Validation Strategies

Although it is impossible to eliminate all bias, extensive efforts have been taken to ensure that researcher bias does not negatively influence test results and skew data from the planning through data analysis (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). To begin, the positioning section (chapter

one) discloses personal perspectives, experiences, and conclusions on the research topic.

Analysis of protective factors identified was performed alongside a member of the research team.

Data gathered compare multiple sources of secondary data to add another layer of validity to the study and develop a more holistic perspective (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Finally, the analysis describes in detail the data collected to produce a thick description, highlighting participant voices and allowing readers to make judgements on the transferability of research findings (Denzin, 2001).

Chapter Four: Results

An old van pulls into the driveway of Equine Encounters Program participants. With their shoes on several hours before and an excitement that did not allow them to eat, two Yazidi girls bounded out the door. They greeted the equine instructor with big hellos and an offer of water. “Smells like horses already,” one of the girls said, smiling as she found her seat in the van. As they left to pick up the other girls and volunteers, the mother and little sister watched curiously from the garage. There was laughter, the telling of stories from their day, questions about the horses they soon would meet, and moments of awkward silence. “Are the other girls coming?” one of the volunteers asked, joining the group with contagious energy and greeting the new girls in Kurmanji. The atmosphere was expectant; ripe with the thrill of adventures yet to be had.

This was the beginning of a 30-minute ride to the barn, leaving the life of the city and traveling into the expanse of the countryside, a space which reconnects me with my own childhood, and as I have come to learn, many of the program participants with their homeland of Iraq. “I didn’t realize how beautiful Lincoln is. I could just sit out here,” said one of the girls as we crested over a high spot on the edge of the city with a bird’s eye view of the land sprawled out before us. Everyone in the van agreed. It was a special moment, like so many that happened in the program, that we can all hold on to when we need to be reminded that sometimes resilience requires a change in perspective, reminders that we are not alone, and new, exciting possibilities.

Having experienced first-hand many of these moments through the program as an instructor, I have embarked as a researcher on an exploration of what this program means for the girls from their perspective and how it has impacted their wellbeing using their own cultural definition. My unique position of being both an instructor and researcher has allowed me to

capture even the most nuanced of expressions and richly describe the concepts and ideas they highlight from the program. As an adolescent once obsessed with horses myself, and now, as an adult, daily struggling to connect a life lived in many places, these moments and their words are meaningful to me, too. They inspire and beckon me closer, reminding me of the hopeful gifts we give and receive in community. Experience for yourself this phenomenon as told through their words, and the echoing support of reflections and observations from instructors, volunteers, and their supporters. Journey with me now as I share this study's findings, providing a description of the session results, an explanation of the wellbeing categories, and the synthesized analysis of Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing.

Session Results

Session results described below provide a holistic description of each programmatic encounter, interplaying emic (participant) and etic (instructor, volunteer, and other supporter) perspectives through diverse data types (e.g., reflections, programmatic documents, observations) to document the process of participant changes over time. It is from this level of description that a natural pattern of relationship development and trust may be observed, allowing participant cultural values, norms, and roles to organically surface over the four sessions of the Equine Encounters Program. Results from each session below share insight into the equine therapy process reporting on [1] general feelings reported and observed, [2] advances in participant familiarity with horses, the facilities, and the program in general, and [3] insights into bonding between participants, their assigned horses, and instructors/volunteers.

Each Equine Encounters Program session lasted for a total of two hours and all sessions were completed within one month. Sessions generally progressed as follows: introductions/greetings, preparatory activities (e.g., brushing and saddling horses), a warm-up

(e.g., mindful stretching on horseback) and review of main concepts, new skill practice, a decompression activity (e.g., free choice time), session wind-down activities (e.g., untacking), reflections, and time for the group fun.

Session one.

(Girl #1) It was scary. He smelled me a lot. I liked getting to see them. I just liked the vet part not the riding or the leading part.

(Girl #3) I liked when I was leading the horse and I was on it. Next time when we come are, we still going to have the same horse?

During this first session, participants found themselves on the periphery of the community circle as described by Wenger (1998). Feelings they shared to describe the experience ranged from nervous to excited. The newness of the experience was evident in the reflections they shared and the questions they asked. Bonding with the horses flowed at the pace set by each participant with two participants being more open to the experience of working with large animals and two being more reserved. Interactions, collaborations, and engagement with instructors, volunteers, and in community were found to support the bonding process with participants and to aid the achievement of session objectives.

General feelings. Participants used the words nervous, scared, excited to describe how they felt before the first session. They used the words comfortable, happy, calmer, awesome, and accomplished to describe how they felt after the session. When the volunteers/instructors and their mother reflected about how they perceived the girls to experience the lesson, they shared that the girls appeared to feel nervous, scared, timid, excited good, comfortable, happy, surprised, curious, relaxed and thankful. They also shared that the girls enjoyed the lesson and were smiling the entire time, even during situations where they appeared nervous.

Familiarity. During the first session, participant reflections and questions asked showed their curiosity about basic horse, facility, and program information. With this knowledge, they

began to make connections about horse behavior and characteristics (e.g., herd mentality and horse nature) as well as the barn and barn rules (e.g., learning where brushes go, horse safety).

Examples of their reflections include:

(Girl #1) Their heartbeat is like really slow. I learned how to measure them.

(Girl #2) How many horses do you have (in the program)?

(Girl #3) I learned how to brush them, not to go behind or underneath them.

Bonding. The participants exhibited different levels of bonding with their assigned horses. For girl #1, just being around the horses and seeing them was where she felt comfortable. Girl #2 felt most connected with walking beside the horse. Girl #3 connected with the horse at a faster pace, enjoying both the walking and leading activities. Girl #4 advanced quickly and began the harder process of trying to “read” what the horse was telling her in order to accomplish the session objectives. Examples of these bonding indicators are:

(Instructor) Girl #1 did not feel comfortable letting the horse smell her and would withdraw (her hand) but kept trying.

(Girl #4) If you really want them to do something, then you have to like, make yourself believe that you are in charge. Well, you are but not let the horse take control over you. I want to learn how to bond with the horse. I did, but more.

Throughout the lesson, instructors and volunteers worked to establish credibility with participants by recognizing their needs and acting on them. For example, girl #3 talked a lot with the instructors and they answered her questions throughout the lesson. Volunteers also shared examples and personal stories with the participants. With girl #1, the instructors took turns side-walking with her, giving extra explanations and providing breathing activities. At the end of the lesson, reflections included:

(Girl #1) I want to learn not to get scared of them.

(Volunteer) Girl #1 was nervous but then got more comfortable.

(Girl #2) It was like easy and fun at the same time and you got to know them a little bit better too.

(Girl #3) I want to learn (how) to ride the horse myself.

(Girl #4) You guys are really good at teaching us what to do, so it's easy to do. It's not stressful at all.

(Supporter #2) The instructors are calm and knowledgeable.

During the session, several unexpected events also aided in community bonding. An instructor observed a mother and little sister drove the participants to the barn and watched their first session, offering to take pictures and hand out snack. Before and after lessons, she spent time talking with instructors who also made sure to include both mother and little sister in introductions and greetings with the horses. In the middle of the session, humor cut the nervous tension of participants as one of the horses broke wind repetitively and the entire group laughed at the situation.

Session two.

(Girl #1) I noticed that me and my horse are lazy...He was sneezing a lot. I have allergies too by seasons, not all the time.

(Girl #3) I noticed that if you tell your horse multiple times, he'll do it.

During the second session, participants were able to move past initial impressions and thoughts of the horses to make more personal connections, practice riding techniques, and experience new spaces. Feelings they shared to describe the experience continued to include scary but also fun. The risks they took to try new activities reflect a growing sense of confidence in the program and with the horses, instructors, and volunteers. During this session, bonding with the horses played an important role for girl #1 and girl #2, who in the first session, were more comfortable with seeing and walking beside their horses, respectively. Pattern work activities,

games, riding outside, and time spent after the lesson playing together supported community bonding in new ways.

General feelings. Feelings coded in the second session indicated that participants began the session feeling relaxed and eager in response to low-stress activities (e.g., brushing the horses). This level of comfort allowed the girls to take new risks with moderate-level activities during the lesson (e.g., closing their eyes at a walk). However, higher-stress planned and unplanned events during the lesson (e.g., challenging session activities, horse stumbling) caused participants to feel scared, uncertain, and even precautious about the experience. As the session progressed, participants received support when faced with high-stress situations. In their reflection on the overall experience at the end of the lesson, participants shared more positive feelings (e.g., fun and easy) regardless of the higher-stress activities, acknowledging a change in their level of comfort, confidence, and sense of accomplishment.

(Girl #1) I liked starting to ride them on our own. I was scared at first but then you start to trust them more and then you become more friends.

(Instructor) They performed the stretches with more ease (relaxed) than the first day.

Familiarity. In the second session, participants honed-in on subtleties of the horses' personalities and physical characteristics, new programmatic experiences, and interesting/fun facts about instructors and volunteers. Their recognition of these subtleties at the end of the session, indicates the scaffolding of their familiarity with the program and community. This familiarity was driven by their experience of group ice-breakers, activities which required participants to respond to horse behavior/abilities, and the opportunity to experience riding outdoors. Their use of words like scary and fun combined with their excitement and enjoyment of the session as described in instructor notes may be understood as indicators of a growing sense of safety potentially associated with their familiarity.

(Girl #2) They're smarter. Last time, I didn't know that they know what trot means.

(Girl #4) I have a small dog so I felt like when I would pull him, I would hurt him, but I didn't realize the difference in strength.

(Girl #1) I liked going outside (riders experienced the outside riding area).

Bonding. Instructor reflections shared an overall sense of growing relationships between the girls, their horses, instructors, and volunteers. Pattern work for this session was challenging giving instructors/volunteers an opportunity to support participants through frustrations and celebrate with them in their successes. Playing games (e.g., basketball on horseback) also helped to relieve tension through laughter and fun. Riding outside was an experience that helped participants to connect more with volunteers as they walked beside the participants for half of the time and then they switched positions, allowing the participants to have the opportunity to see what it is like to be a side-walker. During this time, the participants and volunteers spent time getting to know one another and sharing stories. Instructor notes also indicate how the horse of one of the girls tripped. This was a trust-building experience for her with her horse and also with the instructors/volunteers as they accompanied her through the event. Concluding the session, time was spent playing together with the dogs at the barn and eating snack while the horses were present.

(Instructor) Girl #2 had a hiccup today when her horse stumbled over his own hooves and she shifted in the saddle. It rattled her a bit, but she did not want to stop and pushed through her emotions with the help of an instructor...

(Girl #2) ...after I almost fell off the horse, I was a little more scared to go on him but we did more like exercises and stuff so that made me like, trust him more...

(Girl #3) I learned that one of the volunteers has a favorite song.

(Girl #4) I learned that one of the volunteers comes here (barn) like three times a week.

Session three.

(Instructor) The girls hopped right on and acted as if they have been riding for quite some time now. It was evident that all the riders were comfortable and had expectations of how the horses would respond.

(Volunteer #5) They talked to the horses and asked them to do each thing.

During the third session, participants tuned into their horses' emotions on a deeper level than the first two sessions, beginning to notice how the horses interacted with each other.

Participants also shared pride in the relationships that they developed with their assigned horse. Despite feelings of being scared and nervous, they also shared a growing sense of confidence as they worked to gain more independence with riding. With a stronger bond to their horses, participants were able to accomplish session objectives more independently. During reflections, they shared appreciation and love for their horse. Community bonding occurred in new ways as the participants and one instructor in particular spent extra time together on the way to and from the barn. Participants saw the homes of the horses and the instructor saw theirs.

General feelings. Participants expressed feeling scared, nervous, confident, more prepared, and a sense of love toward the horses. Instructors echoed these feelings and added that the girls continued to be excited and appear increasingly more comfortable.

(Girl #2) I love the dogs and horses.

(Girl #3) That I have the best horse. I was more confident.

Familiarity. The lesson activities for session two involved learning a different way to steer the horses (i.e., neck reining), how to saddle and untack with little to no help, and about other horses at the facility. As well, naturally occurring opportunities to learn about horse habits (e.g., rolling in the mud) allowed the girls to become more familiar with typical behaviors.

(Volunteer) All of the girls knew how to stop their horses and correct them.

(Girl #4) How do they roll because the (lead)ropes are so short?

Bonding. Participants purposefully talked to and gave recognition to the horses throughout the entire lesson. They were also very concerned with making sure that at the end the horses received a treat for their work, and during reflections, continued to pay attention to the behavior of the horses (e.g., when they would look around, whinny) evidence of a growing bond between horse and rider. For this session, one of the instructors picked up the participants and volunteers, taking them to the barn. The participants offered water, shared stories about their day and asked many questions about the program. One of the girls also asked about the possibility of her dad to garden at a nearby location. Further introduction and riding games as well as time spent together after the lesson with the horses and dogs continued to support community bonding and fun.

(Girl #4) I had a better experience with my horse than I ever had. I don't know but he just really participated except a little toward the end he got tired.

(Instructor) As the horses began to leave the riding area, they whinnied to each other. One of the girls asks, "How do they cry?" so we spoke about horse communication and another girl comments, "The other horse is so calm."

(Girl #3) One of the instructors lived in Arizona and California.

Session four.

(Girl #2) Horses are my favorite animal now. I had a better experience with my horse than I ever had. I don't know but he just really participated, except a little toward the end (when) he got tired.

(Girl #3) I will remember learning how to ride. Having fun. At first, we didn't know how to do it but then we went outside, and you started letting us ride like without anyone around (walking beside them).

During the fourth session, participants experienced new activities that made them feel initially nervous as they tested the bond they have established with horses, the instructors, and volunteers. Through increased participant familiarity with horses and horse care, their feelings

and bond with the horses and community became stronger. All activities before, during, and after the session led to a sense of calmness and oneness, felt by all.

General feelings. Participants shared that there were many activities that they enjoyed, and activities made them feel a little scared. Participants expressed that by trusting the horses, they were now better at the activities that made them feel scared. Instructors shared that the participants appeared to feel nervous, excited, relaxed and happy.

(Girl #3) I liked trotting because at first, I was scared but now I'm better at it.

(Girl #4) I think riding horses is very therapeutic.

(Volunteer) I thought that allowing them to ride bareback was important because it's new and kind of scary the first time. They also can feel how the horse moves underneath them, helping them understand how calming riding is.

Familiarity. With all the needed skills in place to ride independently with supervision from afar, participants practiced trotting on their own to become familiar with how it feels to be completely in charge. Following this activity, participants were given the opportunity to be led several times around the arena bareback at a walk. This activity allowed participants to become familiar with horse movement as they could easily feel each stride of the horse. It also allowed them to feel what it was like to ride different horses as the horses used for riding bareback were alternated. Two of the girls felt comfortable enough walking bareback that they also had the opportunity to practice trotting for a short distance bareback while being led. Following the lesson, participants spent time with the instructors and volunteers outside learning how to bathe horses.

(Girl #3) ...you have to feed them (horses), wash them sometimes...that's fun.

(Girl #2) I started to trust my horse when I could ride him without holding a rope (this refers to not having a volunteer lead the horse around the arena).

(Volunteer) I think it was important for the girls to trot on their own with little help from us. It tests their abilities and they learn that they are able to do it independently.

Bonding. Having the opportunity to ride independently was an important bonding moment for the participants. Riding bareback, with literally nothing separating rider and horse makes the rider feel more vulnerable because they do not feel that they have as much control. To ride bareback, balance must be found without the normal support and safe guards of the saddle. At the conclusion of the lesson, participants spent time painting, feeding and washing the horses together with instructors and volunteers while the dogs played all around, and other horses were in an adjacent pasture. It was a free, leisurely moment for all involved, where each person took part in activities of their choice and simply enjoyed spending time with one another.

(Girl #4) The best part about today was riding without the saddle and painting the horse. I will remember riding the taller horse.

(Girl #2) You taught me how to like sit on them today, so it was better.

(Instructor) The connection that the girls formed was important to the confidence that we saw on the final day of the program. Girl #1 in particular, we noticed come a long way. Today, compared to the first lesson, we saw her “gel” with her horse.

(Instructor) While painting the horses today, all of the girls either wrote the name of their horse or painted hearts, flowers, etc. Afterward, they had an opportunity to see how to wash a horse and were each very concerned with making sure that the horse was clean, brushing her very carefully. They also greeted the other horses that they did not know naturally and by themselves, feeding them grass.

Participant Commonalities

During the discussion of the Equine Encounters Program celebration event, participants and their supporters were guided in one final reflection on the experience. The final reflection covered topics, such as their favorite and most challenging activities, how the program was helpful/meaningful to them, and their overall thoughts on the program. To better understand how activities and the program in general met their needs and wants, participants were also asked to

describe in as much detail as possible their best day ever. This information was requested in order to evaluate current program activities and develop new ones based on what they find life-giving. After each participant took a turn sharing about their best day, they were asked to work together to determine commonalities among their experiences. They did this by comparing all the best day stories presented, discussing additional thoughts, and connecting everything together until they felt that the most important common elements of their collective best days were represented. All commonalities identified by the participants revolved around a concept they termed “social,” and were dependent on the commonality they deemed most important, that of their relationships with family and loved ones. These commonalities and their connection to one another as described by participants are shared in detail below.

Family and loved ones. Two participants described their best day to involve spending time with immediate family, one participant described her best day to include immediate family and horses, and another participant’s best day involved meeting a teacher and spending time with friends that she felt close to. Upon hearing how one participant included horses, the other participants also discussed the dogs at the barn and other family pets. Working together to determine a commonality among these experiences, participants concluded that all of their best days involved family and loved ones who are important to them, terms understood to cover both family, other people (e.g., friends, instructors), and animals (e.g., horses, dogs, family pets) that they care about and that care about them.

Greetings and compliments. In describing their best day, one of the participants shared how upon entering a classroom, she greeted everyone verbally saying, “Hi, there!” Another participant shared that she told others, “Merry Christmas...happy birthday...(and) other greetings” and that others also shared greetings with her. A different participant shared that she

told others “Hi” and they said “Hi” back with a smile. The last participant discussed meeting her horse for the first time, an act which the group determined to involve both verbal (e.g., saying hello to the horses) and nonverbal greetings (e.g., letting the horse smell them). Connecting their stories, participants also considered personal compliments (e.g., “Someone told me I look beautiful) and general compliments (“I told others that it was the best day ever.”) to be an important commonality among their stories. Like greetings, these personal and general compliments were found to be reciprocal in nature, personally received and shared with family and loved ones.

Environments. When comparing stories, participants felt the need to also describe the types of environments their best days occurred in. One participant’s best day involved time spent in an amusement park with much noise and activity. Another participant shared how her day occurred at a family home where family members were eager to talk to one another and engaged in many different activities (e.g., cooking, gift exchange). One best day occurred at the HFH facilities, inside the covered arena, where participants engaged in numerous program activities and reflections with the group, and outside where it was “really quiet (and) empty.” Discussing these experiences, the participants determined that environments were special when they were either very busy or quiet and empty.

Special activities. Reflecting on their experiences, participants noticed that their best days all involved what they termed “special activities.” Participants’ best days covered amusement park rides, holiday activities at family member’s house, Equine Encounters Program activities, and activities from the first day of a new school year. In their nature they were “something that’s more memorable like that you don’t regularly do.” The activities were considered also special because they were done with family and loved ones.

Spiritual (components). When discussing this commonality, participants described how their best day made them feel, using the following phrases, “At the end of the day, I felt good,” “I felt very joyful and thankful,” “I felt happy and weight off my shoulders,” and “I felt happy and I was glad I went.” Again, they emphasized how all of the experiences were “social” and shared by family and loved ones. To be social, the experience needed to involve and engage all members.

Food. All of the participants’ best days involved eating some sort of food. They described traditional dishes prepared by family members on special occasions, desserts shared during celebratory events (e.g., ice cream, cake), and daily meals/snacks (e.g., school lunch foods, fruit). These foods were considered an important commonality because of the act of sharing it with family and loved ones in “social” situations.

Connections Among Commonalities

While reflecting on the commonalities, several connections arose. To begin, participants discussed how sharing feelings, greetings, and compliments were also linked to “social.” Participant comfort in sharing feelings was considered dependent upon established relationships in which they felt safe and valued. “I was expecting all the people that went to that (informational) meeting to be there but it was only us, so I liked it better...It was just family and I feel more comfortable around family rather than strangers.” This sense of comfort allowed participants to not only share feelings but also their thoughts throughout and while reflecting on the program as evidenced by comments, such as “I felt more comfortable because there were like instructors that knew what they were doing because I didn’t really trust the volunteers as much but soon, I got used to it.”

Further discussion of the “special activities” commonality by participants included aspects of time and place. The time of activities also contributed to why they were special, occurring during either holiday breaks (e.g., summer/fall) or a marked transition of a new experience (e.g., the first day of the school year). Moreover, special activities required them to travel for either short or long distances to a location different than their home. The nature of the place where the activity occurred was additionally linked to the commonality of “environment.”

When times get rough, participants discussed how support from others helped them to address challenges. This involved participants finding relief “by talking to loved ones or family or being socialized (spending time together).” Another way mentioned to provide support involved engaging in activities together, “like just make it a little bit better cooking.”

In a later discussion, participants also linked positive feelings of the spirit, like “blessed and fulfilled” to the commonalities of “special activities” and environments. These were

evidenced by statements regarding programmatic activities where participants were mindful or reflective of the environment, such as “the wind, the beautiful smells.” This connection also adds a deeper layer to the understanding of the commonality of “environment,” sharing that it is not only unique spaces which are empty or busy but also spaces that offer a sense of connection through sensory detail.

Finally, in subsequent conversations, it became evident that certain activities participants enjoyed were not geared toward productivity, but rather pleasure. For example, participants described “the bean bag (toss) because I was really good at it” referring to the games that they played in several lessons. They also described more free structured activities, such as riding outside through comments like, “I felt really happy that like the horses can have the time and we can have our own time.”

Supporter Elements

In a separate discussion during the celebration event, supporters were asked to describe what makes a day really great for participants. Elements identified by supporters included taking them somewhere, giving them treats, being with family, and exciting/fun opportunities that give them something to look forward to and that encourage them. Feeling that the elements were clearly expressed, no further explanation was provided. These elements also provide support for and add depth to the terms of commonalities expressed by the participants.

Wellbeing and Protective Factors

In light of the connections drawn between participant commonalities and elements of what makes a day great contributed by supporters, new categories were created to more holistically encompass the experiences portrayed. These new categories comprise what it means for participants to feel well in a “social” situation. They are understood to strengthen and support

the center of participant wellbeing and are therefore considered protective factors. With this understanding, their presence is a predictor of their wellbeing, or as the participants themselves describe it, “social” or positive interactions with family and loved ones. The protective factors include [1] greetings and compliments [2] sharing thoughts and feelings [3] authentic environments and activities [4] accompaniment during challenging times [5] interconnectedness [6] leisure activities. Each of these protective factors is described in detail below alongside findings analyzed from data of their presence within the program. Using this information, the program is then evaluated for its effect on the overall wellbeing of the program participants.

Greetings and compliments. The protective factor of greetings is summarized to include both nonverbal cues (e.g., smile) and verbal expressions (e.g., “Hi”) used to begin a “social” interaction. Compliments are considered to be a protective factor encompassing both personal and general reflections in response to an experience. An important component of both greetings and compliments is that they are reciprocal in nature, being both personally received and shared.

Greetings. Throughout the Equine Encounters Program, natural greetings were evident between the entire group (participants, instructors, volunteers, supporters) and with the horses. Each session, participants, instructors, volunteers, and supporters verbally greeted each other with a simple a ‘hi,’ ‘hey’ or ‘hello’ while nonverbal greetings took the form of a smile, high five or even a hug. Verbal greetings to horses mirrored that of the group to each other while nonverbal greetings with horses referred to calmly approaching the horses, allowing them to smell you, gently petting their neck, and even giving them a hug.

(Instructor) They were eager to greet instructors and the horses and start brushing. They were gentle with the horses and made sure to greet each horse. As they went from horse to horse, they were smiling and curious, asking questions about each one.

(Girl #1) Every day you have to greet them (the horses). Like you can’t run up to them because they’re kinda like humans in a way.

(Girl #2) My best day ever was the first day I met my horse. I was nervous. I didn't know what the horses were like and I didn't know their personalities and stuff. When I met my horse, I got to know him better and got more comfortable around him. I told others that I was the best day ever and I wanted to go next week.

Designated time for these activities was also intentionally structured into the program curriculum and also occurred each session. For example, participants spent getting know one another before the session began. During the first session, greetings took the form of introductions for all people and horses by sharing their name, age/what they do, and something fun/interesting about them. Each following session, greetings deepened through continued introductory activities and conversation. From one session to the next, they became a part of the routine, supporting the positive development of relationships.

(Girl #4) One of the instructors rode a buffalo. Another likes to ride tractors.

(Volunteer) I learned that girl #1 has never worked with a horse before.

Compliments. Compliments were given genuinely and reflected a strengths-based understanding of relationship development, focusing on the positive identification and development of strengths. During each session, instructors and gave specific compliments to the participants about "social" interactions and activities they performed well. For example, "You did a great job asking your horse to turn slowly in the box the second time around." Or "I see that you are working to sit tall in the saddle. That is making a big difference in your posture and balance. Nice!" The girls also shared compliments when reflecting about the work of the horses, the instructors, and volunteers, such as "You guys are really good at teaching us what to do, so it's easy to do. It's not stressful at all."

Verbal and nonverbal compliments to/about the horses involved showering with affection, speaking highly of them to others, rubbing their neck, spending extra time spent

brushing and talking to them, and also giving them a treat at the end. After witnessing the program in action and hearing about it from the participants, supporters also extended compliments about the program while reflecting, sharing compliments like, “The instructors are calm and knowledgeable.”

Sharing thoughts and feelings. Mutually sharing thoughts and feelings is considered an protective factor and important part of “social” interactions with family and loved ones. The ability to do so openly and honestly is intimately connected with the development of participants established relationships and their sense of safety and worth. Under these conditions, sharing thoughts and feelings was viewed as a mechanism for continued relationship development. Although time for reflections was intentionally structured into each program session, participants felt comfortable enough with each other, the instructors, and volunteers that they freely asked questions and shared thoughts and feelings outside of reflections as well. The following statements shared by participants illustrate how thoughts and feelings were positive, negative, and exploratory in nature as participants worked to become more familiar with horses.

(Girl #4) I had a better experience with my horse than I ever had. I don’t know but he just really participated except a little toward the end he got tired. I was more prepared this time.

(Girl #1) My least favorite part was trying to turn him (the horse) with one hand.

(Girl #3) If I come back next week, how can my horse tell that he’s seen me before?

Authentic environments and activities. For participants, authentic environments and activities is a protective factor that sets the stage for their interactions outside the home, affecting participant ability to genuinely connect and take risks outside the home. As a result of their location (e.g., require some travel to reach) and physical characteristics (e.g., setting considered beautiful to participants), an authentic environment is an unique space which participants

connect to and which may evoke in them feelings of activity/energy, peacefulness/tranquility, and/or inspiration/renewal. Authentic activities take place in authentic environments and are purposefully designed for “social” growth, offering opportunities for personal and group development to strengthen positive interactions between family members and/or loved ones. They also occur during a time of the year where there is natural time and space for growth, reflection, and renewal (e.g., holiday breaks, the first day of the school year).

Reflecting on the program in regard to this protective factor, participants discussed the commute to the equine facility and riding in the outdoor/indoor arenas. To begin, the HFH facilities is located in a small town approximately 30 minutes from the city where the participants live. Depending upon the route taken, it is possible to see open land in as little as ten minutes into the drive. The drive to the facilities takes participants over two bridges, through farmland, and the small town center, offering both time and space to unwind before beginning the program. The facilities itself is located on roughly forty acres and includes a stable, covered and outdoor riding arena, and an enclosed outdoor space for beginner trail rides, which is adjacent to pastures and smaller pens where horses are released to spend time outdoors. The land is rolling with open spaces, trees, and flowers. The owner of the facilities lives on the property and while the Equine Encounters uses horses specific to the program, the owner’s three dogs, a cat, and personal horses form a part of the experience. The number of horses at the facility fluctuates depending on a variety of factors, however, generally speaking, there are 14 to 16 horses on the property. At the facilities, there is simultaneously activity, whether of horses at play outside or through program activities in the riding arenas, and a sense of calmness and beauty, portrayed through the physical space and natural environment it offers. Sessions for this particular cohort of the Equine Encounters Program occurred during the month of August, with two morning sessions

occurring during participants' summer break and two afternoon session at the beginning of their school year. Morning sessions during the summer were the preference of the group, reemphasizing how liminal time for the program both in terms of waking hours and months during which it occurs is of value to participants. This environment and the activities that the Equine Encounters Program offered the girls was found to both inspire and motivate them.

(Volunteer) It allows them to get out and get hands on experience with something they can't do every day.

(Supporter) They were very like very excited about horses. On Wednesdays, they were like when are we going? Or what time are we leaving?

(Supporter) I think it helps a lot to have something to look forward to. So, doing the day to day routine and then, "oh, on Wednesday I'm going to go ride horses."

(Girl #2) I also liked it in the morning because it was like really nice and refreshing and the sun hadn't come up yet but when we came after school it was like really hot and sweaty.

(Girl #4) I feel like the bridge is more outdoors, not literally outside but outside of what you regularly do. So, like something different because it kind of felt like you weren't in the same place just walking but then you go over the bridge, it's actually like a big deal.

(Girl #2) When we went with the horses it was way different than what I usually do.

In terms of the opportunities for "social" growth or personal and group development, the participants reflected on how the activities, such as learning to lead a horse, trot, and the experience in general provided them with an opportunity to strengthen their self-efficacy, develop trust, and be more open to taking risks.

(Girl #1) It was hard for me to walk it. (It helped) to believe in myself that I can walk.

(Girl #2) When I was trotting I was scared and nervous, but I just had to believe in myself and just do it because I knew that it was going to end well.

(Girl #3) It helped me trust myself and my horse. It's very rewarding.

(Girl #4) It allowed me to like not be afraid to take different chances.

Accompaniment during challenging times. Having accompaniment or someone to “walk with you” during challenging moments or times was found to be a protective factor for participant wellbeing. Accompaniment is understood to mean support that empowers and assists a person to continue pushing forward despite the obstacle faced. It is different than handing off a problem to another person in that it may involve the other person(s) assisting by simply being present or by being more involved, providing insight and/or potential ways to tackle a problem. Regardless of the challenge faced, the goal of accompaniment is to provide a sense of solidarity or emotional support in order to continue advancing toward an actionable goal or desired outcome.

At some point throughout the program, each participant faced a challenging moment while learning how to interact with horses. Girl #1 initially did not feel as comfortable with greeting her horse and performing the stretches while riding. The horse of girl #2 stumbled while riding and her weight shifted in the saddle making her feel that she would fall. Girl #3 was invited to practice dismounting in new ways from the tallest horse and eagerly, but nervously accepted the invitation. Girl #4 was assigned a very stubborn horse and constantly needed to search for ways to work with him. During these challenging moments, the entire group was together. Instructors accompanied participants, offering suggestions, guidance, and practice to keep moving forward. Volunteers provided physical accompaniment, walking/standing beside participants and leading the horses. Additionally, by performing these activities in the same space and at times, together, participants also supported one another. Through this accompaniment, participants were able to work through the challenges presented either by accomplishing the objective at hand or by making small but promising steps to do so.

(Instructor) Girl #1 was timid, quiet, getting on (the horse) for her was nervous. I side-walked so that she would be comfortable putting her arms up (for stretches). The horse

wanted to smell her and that made her withdraw her hand and take a few steps back but she kept trying. I led her through extra breathing activities to help her feel more relaxed while riding.

(Girl #1) I was scared at first but then you start to trust them more and then you become more friends...by riding them, feeding them, letting them smell you.

(Instructor) At the end of the lesson today, Girl #3 was also given the option to learn a different way of dismounting on her horse (he was trained in many ways) which involves sliding off the back. She was a bit nervous at first because he is the tallest horse but did it and afterward was very excited.

(Girl #3) Getting on the horse by myself and sliding off of the horse (made me scared). I've been riding my horse and I don't think he's that tall anymore.

(Instructor) Girl #4 is very patient with her horse, receptive to instructor help, and reflective while riding-tuning into the horse's reactions, which is helping her to figure out what her horse needs (he has more of a challenging personality).

(Girl #4) For me, he was like very stubborn as they say but I got used to him, so I know what I was supposed to do. Once he knows what he's doing, he's really good.

Interconnectedness. The protective factor of interconnectedness refers to “social” experiences shared by family and loved ones, in which all are personally engaged and interacting with one another in authentic environments and activities. Interconnectedness requires all family and loved ones to also be mindful of the experience occurring. When these conditions are met, interconnectedness feeds and fills the spirit with positive feelings and may be evidenced in physical behaviors indicating renewed energy. Reflecting on the program, participants mentioned riding outdoors as being an interconnected experience. By riding outdoors, participants spent time with the entire group (each other, instructors, volunteers) and horses while in nature. What made this experience feel even more connected for participants was the horses' more open and free behavior in the outdoor riding environment to the more controlled area of the indoor arena. It was an experience shared between all which led to both personal and group renewal as well as general feelings of goodness and happiness.

(Girl #1) They feel trapped inside a barn. I felt good (outside). Like the wind, the beautiful smells.

(Girl #2) They (the horses) don't feel like they feel open (indoors) even though it's like huge because they're usually like out in the really big field... I felt like my horse felt more open and more hyper outside than he was inside. (Outside) you and the horse felt happy.

(Girl #3) Like it's their home. I felt really happy that like the horses can have the time and we can have our own time (outside).

(Girl #4) I liked the outside part because I just feel like I connected to nature. It felt special being outside where the horses feel it's their home. Where the horses get to feel free rather than being in the barn. I felt happy, like really good because I felt like the horse felt more... The horse was more comfortable being outside in the open.

(Volunteer #4) I liked watching them ride outside.

(Instructor) Riding outside together was a good experience.

Leisure activities. Time spent leisurely with family and loved ones is considered a protective factor that provides a foundational base for personal renewal and relationship development. Leisure activities are considered to be “social” activities geared toward pleasure with a flexible agenda that allow for discovery and evoke creativity. Their purpose is to engender feelings of happiness through a break from the everyday routine and to “socially” reconnect all involved by spending time together.

Leisure activities from the program specifically mentioned included activities during sessions, such as painting the horse, games played together (e.g., bean bag toss, egg and spoon on horseback), riding outside, and time spent after the lessons together (e.g., washing the horse, giving the horses treats, playing with the dogs). These activities inspired participants to share about their experience with others, artistically express themselves, discover new talents, connect with the horses in new ways, play with water, run, laugh, and talk to the group about topics of their choice. Although time spent together was limited to around 20 minutes following each

session and while there was some guidance in the activities that were available for participants, no official structure was provided. Participants could choose to engage at their own level of comfort and instructors as well as volunteers were a part of the fun.

(Girl #1) Painting the horse (was the best part about today).

(Girl #3) My favorite (leisure) activity was the tossing thing...bean bag because I was really good at it.

(Instructor) The games were a hit!

(Girl #4) I liked going outside with the horses.

(Supporter) They talked about what they did...they washed horses...They were very happy about it.

(Instructor) The girls played for about 10 minutes with the dogs, running with/after them, throwing balls. The entire time they were smiling, laughing and talking to the animals and instructors/volunteers. Afterward, we went to see the other horses. One of the girls said, "I don't want to leave." Another said, "You have horses and dogs. This is a dream."

(Instructor) While painting the horses today, all of the girls either wrote the name of their horse or painted hearts, flowers, etc. Afterward, they had an opportunity to see how to wash a horse and were each very concerned with making sure that the horse was clean, brushing her very carefully. They also greeted the other horses that they did not know naturally and by themselves, feeding them grass.

IEAT Influence

This section begins with a deep understanding of what it means to be well according to Yazidi adolescent girls. After identifying protective factors associated with their wellbeing, it proceeds to ask about the influence of IEAT on their wellbeing according to the perception of stakeholders. Holistically expanding outward, the final response addresses the central research question, synthesizing all data collected and analyzed. Verbatim quotes interspersed throughout this section have been included where applicable to provide an overall impression of summarized responses and the IEAT influence on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing.

Supporting question 1. How do Yazidi adolescent girls define wellbeing from their cultural perspective?

Wellbeing for Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the Equine Encounters Program is operationally defined to be “positive interactions with family and loved ones.” As previously described, the term, family and loved ones, refers to people and/or animals who have come to hold a meaningful place in their lives while positive or “social” referred to a multitude of interactions (e.g., greetings and compliments, leisure activities) between members occurring in authentic environments that are considered meaningful and constructive. These positive interactions affirm and support their personal development and growth and are evidenced by feelings of safety, self-worth, and confidence. Categories of protective factors found to strengthen and support participant wellbeing in “social” situations include [1] greetings and compliments [2] sharing thoughts and feelings [3] authentic environments and activities [4] accompaniment during challenging times [5] interconnectedness [6] leisure activities. To feel holistically well in “social” situations, all categories of protective factors must be fulfilled.

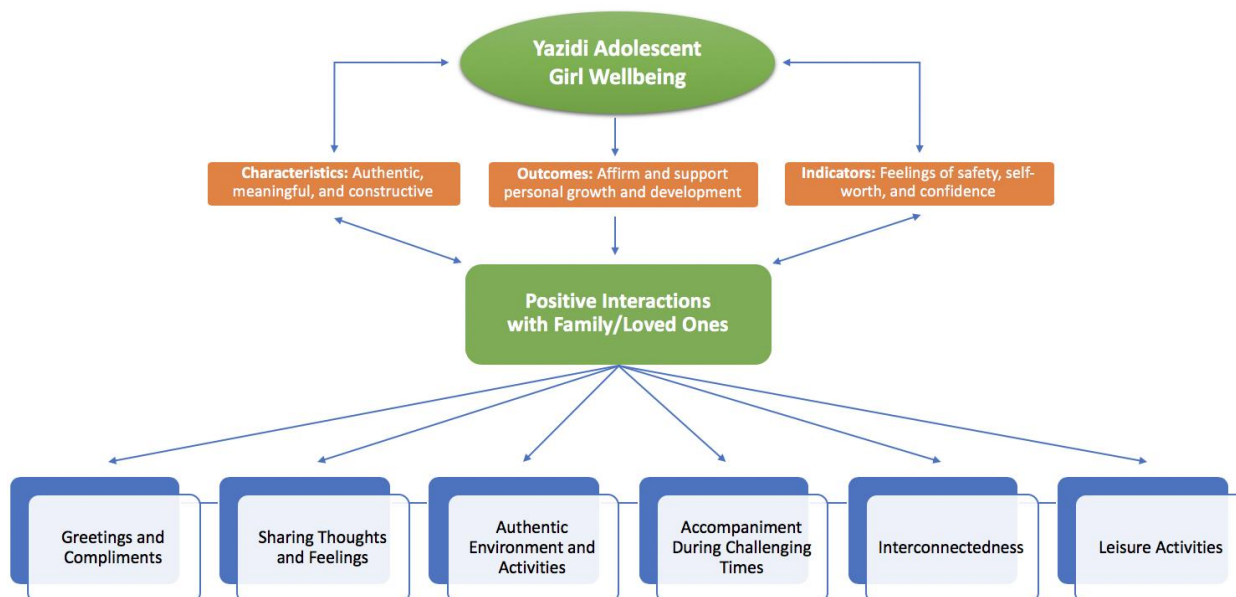


Figure 1. Wellbeing. Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing is operationally defined, including characteristics, outcomes, and indicators for each of the six categories represented.

Supporting question 2. How does IEAT support the development of protective factors identified by Yazidi adolescent girls as central to their wellbeing?

IEAT provided scaffolded opportunities for growth and development in each category of the protective factors. The opportunities provided are described in detail below.

Greetings and compliments. The protective factor of greetings and compliments focused more on the scaffolding of greetings. General compliments shared with participants were present every session, however, they were both generic in nature, “Great job on leading the horse!” as well as more specific “I like the way your heels are down and you are sitting tall in the saddle.” Greetings occurred naturally among all involved in the Equine Encounters Program through nonverbal and verbal expressions and through several structured and non-structured activities each session. For three out of four sessions, the “warm-up” included structured activities. The first session included formal introductions of all involved. The second session, an introductory game was played by instructors, volunteers, and participants to begin forming a deeper connection with one other person. In the third session, instructors, volunteers, and participants played a group get-to-know-you game, testing and expanding what they learned about each other from the first two sessions. During the last session, participants spent extra time brushing and greeting the horses. While greeting and brushing horses was an unstructured activity that was also part of every session, having more time to do so meant that participants were able to put their knowledge about the group to use in conversation, speaking freely with instructors and volunteers.

Sharing thoughts and feelings. At the end of every session, participants and an instructor reflected together on their experiences. Since the participants continued to build their skills of working with horses from session to session, each time they reflected, they had more observations, and asked/were asked deeper questions. For example, in the first session, one of the questions asked to participants was, “What was it like to hear the horse’s heartbeat?”; in the second session, “How did you bond more with your horse today?”; in the third session, “What do you notice about your horse that you did not notice last time?”; in the fourth session, “How can you or have you applied something you have learned from this program to your lives?” Participant questions began by asking more general information about the program and facilities or horses and each session became more specific. During the reflection of the first session, one participant asked, “Do you have girl horses too?”; in the second session, “Do horses have allergies?”; in the third session, “How do they cry?” (this question was later clarified by the instructor with the participant to mean “How and why do horses communicate with each other?”). However, by the last session, participants only had one question on their minds, “When did you say maybe we can come back again? Like in 2 years?”

Authentic environments and activities. For the protective factor of authentic environments and activities, both components were structured to allow participants to grow slowly in their level of comfort with the program. In the first session, participants were introduced to the riding arena and general outside areas. The second session, participants entered the same areas and also were allowed to do a trail ride outside in the enclosed area. The third session, they also visited the other horses in the stables and outdoor pens. The fourth session made use of all areas previously introduced.

Activities created both a routine and a ritual between all involved, beginning with simple greetings/welcome, advancing into more skill-based interactions that required both dialogue and praxis, and ending with time for reflection and leisure. They were designed to help participants feel comfortable and become more independent through a small but steady trail of accomplishments. Beginning activities during the first lesson included basic information, such as how to choose a helmet and fasten it securely, horse and barn safety, basic horse information (e.g., names, types, measuring/grooming them), how to lead properly lead a horse, how to perform a simple pattern, a general overview of tacking horses (e.g., equipment used, process involved), mounting and dismounting practice, basic stretches, and walking and stopping practice. The second session, participants additionally learned more specific grooming techniques (e.g., how to pick a hoof, types of combs), saddle parts (e.g., cinch/girth), were provided with step-by-step instructions to tack/untack a horse and were asked to assist with specific parts of the process, performed additional stretches, played games review games while walking to practice new skills (e.g., steering, backing, trotting with assistance), completed patterns while on the horse, and experienced how horses behavior may change when riding outside. One unique aspect of this session was that while outside, the participants and volunteers were also asked to switch roles, so that participants were also able to understand the role of the volunteer and experience leading another person on a horse. In the third session, participants were invited to be more independent with the grooming, perform more aspects of tacking/untacking, take more risks with stretches, learn new ways of steering (i.e, neck reining), play new games, practice controlling the speed of their horses, trot independently for short to longer amounts of time (depending upon their level). The final session, was a culmination of all of these skills and also, continued to teach them new ones. Instructors assisted with grooming

only when requested, participants performed the majority of tacking/untacking with assistance and supervision, they were invited to close their eyes while stretching and to do stretches with the group and on their own. Each participant also had the opportunity to ride a horse bareback with the assistance of an instructor and volunteers, they were allowed to trot independently on their assigned (and saddled) horse while inside, rode outside at a walk independently as a group, and they learned how to wash a horse while having fun outside.

Accompaniment during challenging times. Accompaniment during challenging times was provided each session to all participants when faced with an obstacle. The process of accompanying the participant varied from one situation to the next however, it typically included a check-in to better assess the situation and feelings of the participant, observation to see how to move forward, guided practice, and a move toward independence. For example, Girl #1 initially felt more nervous around horses and especially, while beginning to ride. Noticing her body position to be more tense than when she arrived, an instructor quickly assessed that she needed additional support. After watching her perform a few of the initial stretches, the instructors agreed to take turns side-walking with her. They provided her with additional instruction and information on riding, walked her through breathing exercises, and allowed her to practice by herself while at a close distance, and when she became more comfortable, walk on her own.

Interconnectedness. Interconnectedness in its entirety was not possible every session, however, opportunities for community connection built from one session to the next. In the first session, participants' focus was on making an initial connections with the horses, instructors, and volunteers. There were two ultimate activities, leading the horse and experiencing what it is like to ride a horse for the first time at a walk. During the second session, participants' connections deepened by learning to interact and engage with their assigned horse independently at a walk,

trot with assistance, and ride outside while being led. During the third lesson, participants played games with each other, enjoying the connection as a group, and practiced trotting with more independence. The final lesson allowed participants to experience what it is like to be “inside the circle.” This meant that they were advanced enough in their riding skills for instructors to allow them to ride independently on a trail ride in the enclosed area outside with supervision. As all were involved in the activity without instruction, participants were able to enjoy the experience on a different level, all the while making connections with the group and the environment. This experience found to be an interconnected experience because everyone, the participants, instructors, volunteers, and horses felt a sense of happiness, freedom, joy, and peace.

Leisure activities. Leisure activities occurred after each session for approximately 20 minutes. Following the first session, the group ate snack together, gave the horses treats, and spent time talking with each other. These activities were repeated after every session and new activities were added. After the second session, the group also was introduced to the dogs and spent time playing with them inside the arena. During the third session, participants played games together (e.g., bean bag toss, egg and spoon on horseback) and afterwards, also played with the dogs. During the final session, participants were allowed to paint the horses, ride outside independently as a group, leisurely wash a horse, feed/visit other horses, play with the dogs, and enjoy the time together outside. Like all of the other categories of protective factors, once participants became more familiar with the program, and in the case of leisure activities, how to have fun at the facilities, they were able to enjoy the experience more as a group.

Supporting question 3. How do Yazidi adolescent girls perceive their experience of IEAT?

Overall, the experience of IEAT was perceived by the girls as opportunity that was fun, interesting and that helped them to grow personally. In particular, the girls discussed how they came to believe/trust more in themselves and others (e.g., instructors, horses), not give up, take risks and try new things, bond with animals, and make a new friend. The girls shared with others in their family and their friends about the experience and expressed sadness that the program was ending. At the beginning and throughout the program, the girls perceived some of the activities as challenging and shared feelings of being nervous or scared. However, these feelings were accompanied by feelings of excitement and comments about feeling safe as a result of the horses' training and professionalism of the instructors. All of the girls voiced gratitude on multiple occasions for the opportunity to be a part of the program and felt that the opportunity would be well-received within their families. They spoke about the possibility of being a volunteer for the next group with certainty, wanting to continue their connection with the community, horses, instructors and volunteers.

(Girl #1) It helped me like to believe in myself, like don't give up on yourself. It's really fun and interesting and you learn new stuff...I would go every day. It will be fun helping other people (in the next group).

(Girl #2) I feel like you'll be like a little scared in the beginning but soon you'll get to trust the instructors and the horses, and you'll like bond with them in a way. In the end it's going to be really fun and you're going to be like sad to leave. Yeah, like it's worth it and you can have a new friend. They (my family) would really like it.

(Girl #3) I would tell someone that it's worth it, to give it a shot, and at first, you would be scared and nervous that this horse is going to drop you off or something, but actually, the horses are really trained. (In the next group) we can like see the horses, you guys and other people, like learning.

(Girl #4) I never thought I would be riding a horse like ever or like bonding that much with it. It's a very different experience that you should take. I'd do it another time and I know a whole bunch of other people...they (family and loved ones) were "oh my gosh, where was that at?" and like, they're asking questions.

Supporting question 4. How do key stakeholders (e.g., parents, case workers, mentors) perceive the influence of IEAT on Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing?

The program is viewed by key stakeholders as being supportive of Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing through dedicated time and space to be together with their families, with other Yazidi girls, and individuals from Nebraska. Through these social connections, key stakeholders, share that the program is helping the girls to have fun, build confidence, form friendships, make connections with animals, try new things, and have something to look forward to every week. Due to the ease and comfort level of the community with the program, it is also perceived as a non-threatening way for the girls and others to receive support that may lead to greater receptivity of other available programs.

(Supporter #1) ...especially in the Yazidi community, because they went through a lot, such programs are helping them to at least go out and having such fun and you know, every week they are thinking in the future to have some fun...

(Supporter #2) They were talking to their cousins about it and how fun it was...They loved every little bit of it.

(Supporter #3) I know every single family that has been a part of the program so far and many... just kind of suffer in silence alone. Those families...have been more willing to attend this than any other program.

Central question. Following refugee resettlement, how does Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) influence Yazidi adolescent girls' wellbeing?

IEAT has been found to strengthen all of the categories of protective factors supporting Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing, including [1] greetings and compliments [2] sharing thoughts and feelings [3] authentic environments and activities [4] accompaniment during challenging times [5] interconnectedness [6] leisure activities. Through positive interactions with family and loved ones, the Equine Encounters Program, developed using the IEAT framework, creates a space where participants feel a sense of safety, self-worth, and confidence. This authentic

environment and its activities both affirm and support the personal growth and development of the participants. As such, IEAT works to foster connections among family and loved ones, and therefore, positively influences their wellbeing.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

Findings from this study support the cultural definition of Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing in the Equine Encounters Program to be “positive interactions with family and loved ones.” These positive interactions are linked to participant sense of safety, self-worth, and confidence and are supported by the following protective factors [1] greetings and compliments [2] sharing thoughts and feelings [3] authentic environments and activities [4] accompaniment during challenging times [5] interconnectedness [6] leisure activities. The presence and quality of these protective factors play an important role in holistic wellness for participants and encourage both their growth and development.

Participant understanding of wellbeing as interactions with family and loved ones is consistent with findings demonstrating support for wellbeing through bonding social capital (Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003) and bridging social capital, especially among women (Beiser & Hou, 2017). Additionally, relationships developed through the Equine Encounters Program, were found to be characterized by feelings of safety and trust, a finding also corroborated by research demonstrating how trust is an indicator for social capital generation (Madhavan & Landau, 2011). Furthermore, social capital may be used to predict resilience and offer forth an theoretical framework for integration (Ager & Strang, 2008) that demonstrates how meaningfully networked communities work to promote both individual and collective wellbeing (Tippens, 2019). The current study also aligns with other research findings discussing how social support helps to circumnavigate systemic support gaps and moderate the effects of social isolation, social insecurity, and dwindling social networks, family conflicts, and more (Stewart et al., 2008). In this way, social support is imagined to be “freedom from” social conflict and “freedom to” exist with strong social bonds (Sen, 1999; Kawachi & Berkman, 2000).

In larger research conducted on families around the world from a strengths-based perspective, a set of global similarities was identified, including: appreciation and affection, positive communication, commitment, effective stress and crisis management, spiritual wellbeing, and enjoyable time together (DeFrain & Asay, 2007). These strengths are considered protective factors to the families' resilience. While resilience and wellbeing are different constructs, they both influence the ability of an individual and/or group to keep moving forward. With this understanding, the protective factors from this study are found to reflect those of global family resilience.

The study of protective factors in equine therapy research is not a novel concept. Previous research has identified protective factors, such as empathy, sense of purpose, and confidence. Another theme also discussed in the literature is the therapeutic alliance in Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy as well as the significance of the human-equine bond (Burgon, 2011; York, Adams, & Coady, 2008). The current research is unique in that it focuses on wellbeing and the protective factors as identified by a specific culture-sharing group, Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the Equine Encounters Program. Moreover, this program was designed to foster the human-equine bond but also to build community connections between participants, instructors, volunteers, and their supporters. According to participants' operational definition of wellbeing in this study, there is a collective implication in its meaning. Yet, in a review of 24 equine-assisted psychotherapy studies, the primary findings centered only on individual participant changes in behaviors, skills, and attitudes (Lee, Dakin, & McLure, 2016), narrowing the presentation of results to microsystemic impact.

As shared by the World Health Organization (2019), "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." While

much research in equine literature mentions or refers to wellbeing, it attempts to measure wellbeing through associated negative symptoms (e.g., depression), positive traits (e.g., hope), function (e.g., emotional, physical), specific dimensions of wellbeing (e.g, psychological), or some combination of the above. Program evaluation research by Alfonso, Alfonso, Llabre, and Fernandez (2015) found a significant reduction of social anxiety symptoms in young women. Frederick, Hatz and Lanning (2015) measured levels of both depression and hope, linking hope to psychological wellness. Research by Kaiser, Spence, Lavergne, and Bosch (2004) measured anger, quality of life, and perceived self-confidence. Further studies have attempted to measure wellbeing through biological markers, such as cortisol (Pendry, Smith, & Roeter, 2014). The equine therapy studies described previously described are all valuable in the field and have contributed greatly to our understanding of its benefits. Albeit, it is unclear from these studies which activities specifically are found to be valuable to participants to reduce symptoms or how they work to promote wellbeing. Furthermore, measurements chosen without regard to participant cultural values, norms, and roles associated with their wellness may not fully capture changes in wellbeing or functioning occurring in equine therapy programs. For example, in the current study, interconnectedness was found to be an important protective factor but was not mentioned in any regard in the research previously discussed.

This studies findings are heavily but not completely aligned with the eudaimonic concept of wellbeing or life activities that are connected to deeply held values and holistic engagement. Comparing the finding to the eudaimonic measures of personal expressiveness (PE; Ryan & Deci, 2000), psychological wellbeing (PWB; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), it is possible to see how each measure is reflected in the operational definition this study provides for Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing, yet also, how the

measures are lacking in several of its features. For example, the concept of personal expressiveness (PE) or “being challenged and exerting effort,” is explicitly linked to the programmatic pattern of presenting continual opportunities to expand skills through new challenges and participants’ “effort” to master them (Ryan & Deci, 2000) but measures this one concept alone. The program also taps into four of the six dimensions of psychological wellbeing including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships but misses the protective factor of interconnectedness (PWB; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Findings from this study may also fit within self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy (agency), competence (confidence), and relatedness (healthy relationships) are three universal, fundamental needs that when fostered and nurtured socially, lead to enhanced wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Boniwell, 2008). In this way, SDT aligns with the current research, through the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice (CoP; Wenger, 1998) and the use of protective factors to “socially” nurture wellbeing. However, cross-cultural tests of SDT have found variances of human nature, influenced by contextual, cultural, and developmental factors. As a result, numerous questionnaires to measure wellbeing according to SDT exist related to these factors and the phenomena under investigation (SDT, 2019). Examples include the Basic Psychological Needs Scales (BPNS; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003), Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI; McAuley, Duncan, and Tammen, 1987), Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003), and Subjective Vitality Scale (VS; Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999), to name just a few. Although, like other measures of eudaimonic wellbeing previously described (e.g, personal expressiveness), none of these scales adequately capture the operational definition found to be a part of this study.

Despite being heavily rooted in eudaimonic wellbeing, this study's findings regarding participants' feelings of being more relaxed and happy while in specific spaces (e.g., outdoors) are more hedonic constructs. Hedonic measures, such as subjective wellbeing (SWB) express the presence/absence of a positive/negative mood as well as life satisfaction (Diener & Lucas, 1999). While hedonic measures do show great insight, in the case of this study, these measures alone are not sufficient as they do not link directly or later map clearly onto findings of participants' growth and development.

Whether eudaimonic or hedonic, existing measurements for wellbeing do not fully represent what it means to be well according to Yazidi adolescent girls participating in this program. Trying to figure out how to best capture the phenomena of wellbeing in a study is a dilemma faced by researchers daring to embark on this challenging task. Paradigmatic differences are the reason of ongoing debate about the definition of wellbeing and one explanation for the existence of such a multitude of wellbeing measurements (Ryan & Deci, 2001). To reveal a more complete picture of Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing with future Equine Encounters Program cohorts, the operational definition of this study may very well need to craft its own measure as well. This understanding falls in line with previous research, which shares that "wellbeing and resilience are in the eyes of the beholder." To avoid the imposition of wellbeing definitions on communities, ethnographic research is recommended as an initial step to "turn back and turn toward" the community itself, visibilizing its values and building on its strengths (Yotebieng, Syvertsen, & Awah, 2018). Lastly, recommendations for best practice and policy to support new American wellbeing include culturally relevant support and intersectoral collaboration, acts which may be more readily facilitated by contextually grounded definitions and understandings of wellbeing to best meet their needs (Stewart et al., 2008).

Limitations

Despite vigor in research design, implementation and evaluation, this study is limited in number of participants due to the nature of the program, financial resources and instructor time available for IEAT sessions outside of regular programming. Though limited in this regard, the comprehensive data collected provide an in-depth understanding of the effect of IEAT on the wellbeing of the participants in the study. Although, its transferability to other Yazidi adolescent girls and refugee populations requires further testing.

Frequency and dosage of the program may also impact the results found on the effect of IEAT on the wellbeing on the participants. However, the Equine Encounters curriculum is based on IEAT methodology, which was developed upon previous experience in work with this population by the HFH team of instructors to meet their scheduling needs as well as those of the participants. Additionally, events outside of researcher control (i.e., parental involvement or loss of a job) may have impacted refugee wellbeing, affecting results. Albeit, unanticipated events are considered to be a part of resettlement, and therefore, part of the process.

Implications for Practice

The operational definition of Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing and protective factors identified resulting from analysis of all data collected hold meaningful implications for the practice of equine therapy with Yazidi adolescent girls and potentially other programs and groups of people who have experienced traumatic stress as a result of refugee resettlement. While equine therapy programs are found around the world to support people experiencing many different challenging circumstances, including youth who have experienced traumatic stress, the use of equine therapy to support people who have experienced refugee resettlement is not

common and little information about available programs and their influence on wellbeing exists (Mueller and McCullough, 2017; Kemp, 2014; Huncar, 2015; AFP, 2016).

This study provides evidenced-based support for the use of Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) to positively support the needs and resilience of Yazidi adolescent girls. It affirms the use of combining multiple different types of equine therapy and best practices from other disciplines (e.g., mindfulness, time for reflection) to support participant needs. Study findings also encourage equine therapy services to be more holistic, involving participants in the care and enjoyment of horses before and after sessions to follow a natural progression of relationship development. Furthermore, study findings suggest a shift toward the creation of more family-based equine therapy and other programs. Such programs should seek to support intergenerational relationship development and strengthen resilience in authentic environments and through authentic activities. The use of findings from this study may be used to create a programmatic guide, trainings, and support for the development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and learning of IEAT and similar programs in other cities, states, and nations.

Implications for Policy

The evidence is clear that trauma has an intergenerational effect and that there is a need to support individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder. Research suggests that providing culturally competent support and integrating numerous types of psychosocial outreach provides a more comprehensive and frequent service for individuals and their families (NCTSN, 2003). Findings from this study confirm that this support should be a community-based effort and that IEAT is beneficial to directly strengthen and increase participant wellbeing and indirectly, community resilience. Many equine therapy facilities are non-profit organizations made

sustainable through a combination of grant funding, sponsorship, volunteers who work without pay, and sessions covered by participants. Although participants in equine therapy programs often incur many health costs, insurance/Medicaid coverage of sessions varies per state and policy. Given this reality, not every participant is financially in a position to afford sessions, even when session costs are reduced (sliding scale) and equine therapy is their preference. Due to the nature of equine therapy sessions, smaller numbers of participants are common, making clinical trials not impossible but an improbable reality for many contexts. As this study concludes, equine therapy has a positive influence on wellbeing. In many situations, equine therapy may be more considered more cost-effective than western mental health models. To make equine therapy more of a possibility for all, Medicaid and insurance policy developers should reconsider the experimental and investigational label assigned to equine therapy with consideration to all studies rigorously designed and carried out in addition to clinical trials.

Implications for Future Research

Findings from this study encourage the continued exploration of wellbeing to more adequately evaluate impact and support resilience. Wellbeing has been historically explored and debated without resolution among investigators, leading to the development of instruments that may not accurately capture the wellbeing of a subject (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Vescovelli, 2014). Moving forward, findings imply that wellbeing must be researched both contextually and culturally on multiple systemic levels (e.g., micro, meso). The new wellbeing categories and protective factors generated from this study may be relevant only to the Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the August 2018 Equine Encounters Program. Further research with other groups of Yazidi adolescent girls also participating in the program is needed to validate findings from this study on a larger scale. As well, future research should seek to

evaluate the transferability of wellbeing categories and themes across other programs developed for Yazidi adolescent girls. Findings from this study indicate that IEAT is a successful equine therapy framework for use with Yazidi adolescent girls, however, it may also be beneficial with other youth who have experienced traumatic stress related to refugee resettlement either directly or intergenerationally. Further research on its use with other refugee populations as well as with all genders and ages of Yazidis (e.g., adolescent boys, women, elders) would document its wider influence.

Whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research, documenting the impact of equine therapy well is a challenge as evaluation is multi-faceted (e.g., physical, emotional, spiritual). As equine therapy continues to grow in practice, research should focus on providing rich and rigorous understandings of its influence. This is currently a gap in the body of equine therapy research that this study attempts to bridge. To more thoroughly investigate the influence of equine therapy, collaborative efforts between qualitative and quantitative researchers across various disciplines is needed.

While many equine therapy programs are considered short-term, occurring for a set number of sessions, there are many that take on a palliative nature, providing services to participants for years. The Equine Encounters Program is a hybrid of the two types, offering an initial eight contact hours of instruction and inviting participants to be volunteers for future groups of participants. The hybrid characteristic of the Equine Encounters Program and the long-term services offered by other equine therapy programs open the possibility for new longitudinal studies, again, with a focus on rigorous design.

Lastly, this study yields findings that suggest future research on the influence of non-western and multimodal therapies to support people living with or experiencing intergenerational

effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. Especially with refugees originating from non-western countries and/or their children born in a western context, research should also be directed toward the generation of preferential and sustainable approaches, considering, for example, more family and community-based psychosocial support.

Conclusion

Wellbeing for Yazidi adolescent girls participating in the Equine Encounters Program is “socially” constructed and may be understood as “positive interactions with family and loved ones.” These positive interactions were both structured and unstructured in each session. Session results from the August 2018 Equine Encounters group report participants feeling nervous, scared, and timid before sessions and excited, comfortable, happy, calmer, awesome, accomplished, good, surprised, curious, relaxed, thankful, confident, prepared, joy(ful), loved/loving, trusting, and lighter after sessions. From one session to the next, participant familiarity with basic horse, facility, and program information advanced, leading to the performance of more complex riding techniques, horse behavioral and personality insights, and programmatic understanding. This familiarity helped participants to feel a sense of security in knowing what to expect from the experience and when coupled with their growing sense of community support through bonding, encouraged them to take risks. Bonding occurred among the community and between horse and participant. Introductory and other activities, such as pattern work, playing games, riding outside, switching roles (volunteers became participants), participating in routines (e.g., tacking the horses) and rituals (e.g., giving them a treat after sessions), riding independently, and riding bareback, strengthened relationships.

Data analysis led to the development of six protective factors that support Yazidi adolescent girl wellbeing, including [1] greetings and compliments [2] sharing thoughts and feelings [3] authentic environments and activities [4] accompaniment during challenging times [5] interconnectedness [6] leisure activities. Through collaborations, interactions, and engagement, in each of the identified categories of protective factors listed above, participants were able to move from an “outsider” to an “insider” position (Wenger, 1998).

Analysis of the Equine Encounters Program according to the operational definition of wellbeing and the protective factors identified revealed that the program is perceived to be a fun, interesting opportunity for growth and development in community. It is a program that has gained community acceptability to support Yazidi adolescent girls, and as such, is a program that both participants and supporters recommend to their family and loved ones. Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT), the framework of the Equine Encounters Program, has therefore been found to successfully support Yazidi adolescent girls, foster connections, and positively influence their wellbeing.

To best report future equine therapy research findings, continued rigorous and innovative design is needed that measures wellbeing both culturally and contextually on multiple systemic levels. Such design will support IEAT practice and with hope, leverage credibility and challenge policy to financially acknowledge its impact on wellbeing. As illustrated by the closing experiential vignette below, cultural, contextual, and community-based psychosocial support is indeed impactful. It is my hope, that through this and future research, it becomes even more accessible.

Experiential Vignette

“One, two, up and over,” the participant repeated as an instructor gave her a knee up. After four sessions, the experience of mounting a horse was becoming routine for her. Climb the three green plastic stairs of the mounting block, hold both of the reins in your left hand placing it on the pommel of your saddle and your right hand on the cantle for balance, put your left foot in the stirrup and with a small spring bring your right leg up and over, swinging your leg into the stirrup and releasing your right arm to grasp the right rein. She went through a mental checklist of sorts— sit softly to keep your horse calm, center your seat in the saddle, and adjust the reins so

that they are equal on both sides. It was simple and simultaneously complicated the first time around, but over the course of the program, it had become like second nature to her, which was why she felt her heart beat when she was invited to mount the horse bareback. No saddle, no reins, just the green mounting block, a tuft of mane, and the trust she had built in her horse. Easier than expected, she slid smoothly onto the horse's back. It was exciting to try something new and slightly unsettling, too. Just when she thought she had it all figured out, she realized how vulnerable of a position she was in. All the usual safe guards were stripped away. One moment of being off balance and she could fall. Yet, she found that she connected with the movement of her horse and let her body move in sync. One, two, three, four. She grasped the horse's mane tightly, closed her eyes and felt every leg move independently beneath her at the walk. This was it, she thought and realized that it all now made sense. "Would you like to trot for a few strides?" an instructor asked, and with the confidence she had gained and the support she knew would be there, she nodded yes in agreement. She squeezed gently with her legs, clicked, and off they went. It was harder to hold on, but she felt free and a laugh escaped her. This risk she took felt good and while more time and practice were needed to master the skill, she now considered it a possibility.

One, after the other, the girls took turns riding bareback and painting a horse together during the last session. Two of the girls decided to trot, but they all chose to walk and afterward, felt a sense of accomplishment. They painted the names of their assigned horses with hearts, flowers, smiley faces, and 'I love you' messages to represent how they felt at the end of the program. They talked with the volunteers and instructors and when they all had a chance to paint and ride, there was still one last step to do. What was painted now needed to be washed clean. We showed the girls how to ease the cold water slowly up the horse's legs, so that it is not a

shock, and how to use the sponges and soap to clean. They took great care of the horse, reflecting silently and together on the experience as they washed. All were involved as work and play mixed seamlessly together, interrupted at times by horses in the pasture who came close for affection. The girls showered them with attention and green grass on the other side of the fence just outside their reach. The dogs from the barn played around us and we clung to the last moments of time together. Hugs and messages of thanks abounded as the girls loaded into the van for the drive back home. “I hope we can do it again sometime. When did you say maybe we can come back again? Like in two years?” shared one participant. “I like coming out,” shared another, echoed by a “me, too” from the back row. “I want to volunteer,” said the last participant and the instructor smiled, blissfully happy for their trail of courage and the positive interactions it will continue to bring.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #18194 - Change Request Form

September 5, 2018

Kari Eller
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

Yan Xia
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
LPH 237.1, UNL, 685880336

IRB Number: 20180518194EP
Project ID: 18194
Project Title: Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) with Yazidi Girls

Dear Kari:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

o Date of Full Board review: 06/28/2018
o Date of Review of Revisions and Approval: 08/14/2018 & 09/05/2018

The change request form has been approved to include the following changes and procedures as described in the form:

exclude future focus groups as the primary research activity and to include the group discussions as part of the secondary data
update the direct benefits/risk and resource sections
update the location and modality of where recruitment and consent is obtained for research
update the participant consent/assent forms to reflect the changes.

NOTE: IR18-18194-001 will not be closed until training is completed with Drs. Xia and Howell-Smith on 09/06/2018; however, commencement of research can begin.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any protocol violation or protocol deviation
- * An incarceration of a research participant in a protocol that was not approved to include prisoners
- * Any knowledge of adverse audits or enforcement actions required by Sponsors
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Rachel Wenzl, CIP
for the IRB



Appendix B: Letter of Support [Horses for Healing]



6300 Princeton Rd
Firth, NE 68358

August 3, 2018

This letter is in support of the changes to the research proposed by Kari Eller, UNL graduate student in the Child, Youth and Family Studies Department, on the overall wellbeing and resiliency of Yazidi adolescent girls participating in Horses for Healing: Equine Therapy and Research Center (HFH) "Equine Encounters" Program.

During the Celebration Event of the "Equine Encounters" Program, HFH agrees to allow Kari Eller the opportunity to inform and invite program participants to the research described above. We acknowledge that the invitation to participate in the research will be by written consent/assent and allow access to data collected during the "Equine Encounters" Program, including the group discussions. Should participants provide written consent/assent, HFH will make available program data collected (e.g., audio recordings of sessions, instructor/volunteer/others' observations, and pictures) for the purpose of research. Before sharing this data, HFH will strip all identifiable private information from written program documents.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding our support of this proposed change to research, please feel free to contact me at any time at karibrandt@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Kari Hoeft". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kari Hoeft

Horses for Healing, President

Appendix C: Adult Consent



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

IRB #:

Formal Study Title: Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) with Yazidi girls

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Kari Eller, UNL Graduate Student

Office: (402) 429-7987

Secondary Investigator: Yan Xia, Ph.D.

Office: (402) 472-6552

Invitation

Thank you for supporting the girls in the “Equine Encounters” Program! To help strengthen and improve the program for other Yazidi girls in the future, you and other parents of girls in the program will participate in a group discussion about your thoughts on this experience and what it means to be well. What is shared in our group discussion as well as information shared from the program like pictures and notes will also be used for research on wellbeing. The information in this form is to help you decide whether or not to participate in the research. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a parent, mentor, caseworker, instructor or volunteer that has supported one of the girls in the “Equine Encounters” Program. To participate in this research, you must be at least 19 years old.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

There are many ways to describe wellbeing. Currently, there is very little information on wellbeing from the Yazidi perspective. There is also very little information known about the “Equine Encounters” Program. How wellbeing is described influences how programs are designed. This research will begin to develop an understanding of Yazidi wellbeing, which may be used to create and improve support programs you and your children are eligible for like “Equine Encounters.”

You are not being asked to do anything beyond the normal activities of the program. I am asking that you allow me to use information that you share in the group discussion and information like pictures and notes from the program that you may be a part of for the purpose of research on wellbeing. Also, many people would like to learn about this research and the “Equine Encounters” Program because it is new. If you give us permission, your thoughts and opinions will be shared in articles and presentations.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

As names will not be used in this study, there is little to no known risk of participating.



How will information about you be protected?

The information you share will be treated with respect and stored in a safe location. The only people who will access this information are other members of the research team. When the research is published in articles and shared in presentations, it will not include your name and anything that could identify you will not be used. After the research is over, I will delete this information.

What are the possible benefits to you?

There are no direct benefits to you for allowing me to use the information you share about the “Equine Encounters” Program.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

By allowing us to better understand what wellbeing means from your perspective, this research may help make this and other programs better for Yazidis. It may also help the “Equine Encounters” Program to grow in other cities.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

There is no compensation that will be offered for the use information shared from the discussion nor other program activities for research. Any reimbursements or incentives you receive are managed by the “Equine Encounters” Program and are not associated with this research.

What are your rights during this research study?

You may ask any questions about this research and have those questions answered before you agree to participate in or during the study. For questions about the study, please contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this form. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 402-472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study at any time, for any reason. This will not affect any current or future services you or your family will receive. If you choose not to participate, nothing will happen.

Documentation of informed consent

Signing this form means that:

- (1) you have read and understood this consent form
- (2) you have had the consent form explained to you
- (3) you have had your questions answered
- (4) you have voluntarily decided to be in the research study

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Participant Feedback Survey**

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This 14 question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous. This survey should be completed after your participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at:

<http://bit.ly/UNLresearchfeedback>.

Participant Name:

(Name of Participant: Please print)

Participant Signature:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Appendix D: Youth Consent



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

IRB #:

Formal Study Title: Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) with Yazidi girls

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Kari Eller, UNL Graduate Student Office: (402) 429-7987
Secondary Investigator: Yan Xia, Ph.D. Office: (402) 472-6552

Invitation

Thank you for allowing your daughter to be a part of the “Equine Encounters” Program! To help improve the program and better help other Yazidi girls in the future, your daughter will be participating in a group discussion about her experience. Also, the information from the group discussion and information shared from the program like pictures and notes will be used for research on wellbeing. The information in this form is to help you decide whether or not your daughter may participate in the research. If you have any questions, please ask.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

There are many ways to describe wellbeing. Currently, there is very little information on wellbeing from the Yazidi perspective. There is also very little information known about the “Equine Encounters” Program. How wellbeing is described influences how programs are designed. This research will begin to develop understanding of Yazidi wellbeing, which may be used to create and improve support programs you and your children are eligible for like “Equine Encounters.”

Your daughter is not being asked to do anything beyond the normal activities of the program. I am asking that you allow me to use information that your daughter shares in the group discussion as well as information like pictures and notes from your daughter’s participation the “Equine Encounters” Program for the purpose of research.

The information your daughter shares will be used to better the “Equine Encounters” Program. Also, many people would like to learn about this research and the “Equine Encounters” Program because it is new. If you give us permission, your thoughts and opinions will be shared in articles and presentations.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

As names will not be used in this study, there is little to no known risk of participating.

How will information about your daughter be protected?



The information your daughter shares will be treated with respect and stored in a safe location. The only people who will access this information are myself and other members of the research team. When the research is published in articles and shared in presentations, it will not include her name and anything that could be used to identify her will not be used. After the research is over, I will delete this information.

What are the possible benefits to your daughter?

There are no direct benefits to your daughter to allow the use of the information she shares from the group discussion nor from the use of information from the “Equine Encounters” Program (e.g., pictures).

What are the possible benefits to other people?

By allowing us to better understand what wellbeing means to your daughter, this research may help make this and other programs better for Yazidis. It may also help the “Equine Encounters” Program to grow in other cities.

Will your daughter be compensated for being in this research study?

There is no compensation that will be offered to your daughter for the use information shared from the discussion nor other program activities for research. Any reimbursements or incentives would be managed by the “Equine Encounters” Program and is not associated with this research.

What are your daughter’s rights during this research study?

You or your daughter may ask any questions about the use of the discussion and other information from the program and have those questions answered. For questions please contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this form. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

<http://research.unl.edu/researchcompliance/human-subjects-research/>

- Phone: 402-472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu



What will happen if you decide not to allow your daughter to be in this research study or decide she needs to stop participating once it starts?

If your daughter does not participate in this research study, nothing will happen. This will not affect any current or future services your daughter or your family will receive. If you decide that your daughter should stop participating in this research, she may stop at any time, for any reason.

Documentation of informed consent

Signing this form means that:

- (1) you have read and understood this consent form
- (2) you have had the consent form explained to you
- (3) you have had your questions answered
- (4) you have voluntarily decided to allow your daughter to be in the research study

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Feedback Survey

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This 14 question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous. This survey should be completed after your participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at:

<http://bit.ly/UNLresearchfeedback>.

Name of Child to be included:

(Name of Child: Please print)

Parent/Legal Guardian Name:

(Name of Parent/Legal Guardian: Please print)

Date

Appendix E: Youth Assent



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

IRB #:

Formal Study Title: Integrated Equine-Assisted Therapy (IEAT) with Yazidi girls

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Kari Eller, UNL Graduate Student

Office: (402) 429-7987

Secondary Investigator: Yan Xia, Ph.D.

Office: (402) 472-6552

Why am I being asked to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you were a part of the “Equine Encounters” Program.

What will I do?

You are not being asked to do anything different from the program. I am asking that you allow me to use information that you share in the group discussion as well as information like pictures and notes from the program for the purpose of research on wellbeing.

Are there any risks?

There are little to no risks from being in this study. If you do not want to answer a question, you do not have to. If you want to take a break or if you want to leave you may do so at any time.

How will this study help me?

There are no benefits to you directly for participating in this study.

How can this study help others?

This study may help make the “Equine Encounters” Program and other programs better for Yazidis. It may also help to grow the “Equine Encounters” Program in other cities.

Will I get anything for being in this study?

No, you will not receive anything for being in this study. Anything you receive comes from the “Equine Encounters” Program.

Will my information be safe?

The information you share will be stored in a safe location. It will not include your name. After the study, I will delete it.

What will happen if I don’t want to be in this study? What will happen if I say yes and then decide later I don’t want to anymore?



Nothing will happen. You do not have to be in this study and you can decide to stop at any time, for any reason.

Have my parents said it's ok for me to do this?

Yes, I have asked your parents for their permission but before you sign this paper, please talk about it with them.

If you have any questions, please ask.

Participant Name:

(Your Signature)

Date

Investigator Signature:

Date

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

Integrated Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (IEAT)

6300 Princeton Road, Firth, NE 68358

<http://www.horsesforhealingne.org>

SET-UP

- 3 instructors, 4 volunteers
- 4 horses (not saddled)
- Grooming buckets
- 3 rows of 2 cones and 2 poles, 1 cone at end

EQUINE OBJECTIVE

Participants will demonstrate how to safely approach, groom, lead, mount and dismount horses.

NOTES

SESSION 1

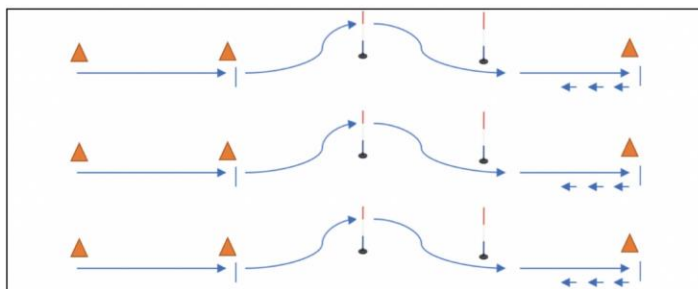
WARM-UP

15 MINUTES Everyone introduces themselves (name, how old/what they do, something they like to do). Volunteers bring over horses one at a time. Instructor introduces horse (name, age, something fun about horse) and girls introduce themselves to the horse. Go over nonverbal communication with horses and barn rules.

10 MINUTES Volunteers and instructors help participants with helmets and grooming buckets. Volunteers show participants how to groom horses. Discuss how to weigh and measure horses to learn basic facts.

LESSON

30 MINUTES Instructors provide a demonstration of how to lead a horse (walking, stopping, turning, backing, safe distance). Each instructor works with two participants on leading a horse and a game is played to practice. Afterward, participants lead horses through a pattern (3 cones: Cone A to Cone B, weave through the poles to Cone C, stop). Other skills to work on if time allows include leading the horse over the bridge, over raised logs, and weaving through the poles. Volunteers will talk with and assist the participants as needed.



45 MINUTES Instructors circulate, bringing saddle, etc. and go over tacking process. Instructors teach mounting and dismounting using block. Two participants are mounted and begin riding. Volunteers lead and the other two participants walk beside with hand on rider's foot or leg for security. While riding, participants practice breathing exercises and stretches (helicopter, hands on head, neck stretches, twisting toward tail, swinging legs) in both directions. After 10 minutes, riders switch.

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

Integrated Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (IEAT)
6300 Princeton Road, Firth, NE 68358
<http://www.horsesforhealingne.org>

OTHER FEEDBACK

WRAP-UP

20 minutes Helmets are returned, and volunteers help participants to untack. Treats are given to horses, participants take a break/get snack, and group reflection follows. All participating in the session are thanked.

INSTRUCTOR REFLECTION

- How did the girls do today?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

VOLUNTEER REFLECTION

- Do you think the girls liked the lesson today? Why or why not?
- How did the girl you worked with do today?
- What did you learn new about the girl you worked with?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION

- What will you tell someone else about today?
- How do you feel about coming today?
- What did you learn new today?
- What do you really want to do here?
- What questions do you have?

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

Integrated Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (IEAT)
6300 Princeton Road, Firth, NE 68358
<http://www.horsesforhealingne.org>

SET-UP

- 3 instructors, 4 volunteers
- 4 horses (not saddled)
- Grooming buckets
- Trail elements (e.g. bridge) for pattern (see drawing)

EQUINE OBJECTIVE

Participants will use walk-halt-walk transitions to perform several activities going both clockwise and counterclockwise around the arena. Participants will steer their horse through poles. Participants will perform 2-step patterns.

NOTES

SESSION 2

PREP

20 MINUTES Participants are greeted, play an introductory game (introduce person beside you), and continue nonverbal communication sheets. The group discusses how horses interacted with them last time, reviews horse, and barn rules. Each girl is assigned a horse, and volunteers assist them with helmets, grooming buckets and saddling. Instructors circulate and connect, teaching vocabulary (i.e., hoof, mane) and checking tack.

WARM-UP

15 MINUTES Participants mount horses with assistance as needed. Volunteers lead horses, instructors facilitate breathing exercises and stretches (helicopter, hands on head, neck stretches, twisting toward tail, breathing, swinging legs, standing in stirrups, closing eyes) in both directions. Emphasis is placed on participant connecting with body while walking, 4 beats in the gait, and posture.

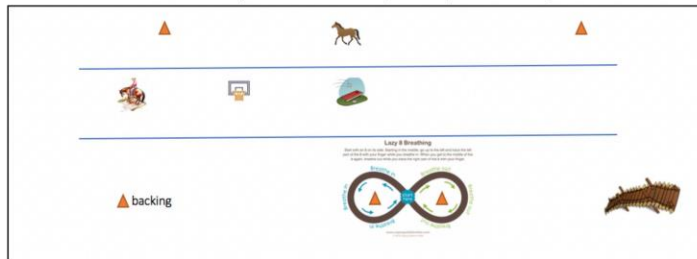
Participants practice walk-halt-walk transitions (red light-green light).

LESSON

45 MINUTES

Instructor demonstrates elements of patterns on horse [1] bridge, figure eights, backing [2] games and box [3] trotting. Participants practice in any order.

Instructor demonstrates patterns and participants complete all below.



20 MINUTES Participants take a trail ride outside. After 10 min. participants switch roles with the volunteers.

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

Integrated Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (IEAT)
6300 Princeton Road, Firth, NE 68358
<http://www.horsesforhealingne.org>

OTHER FEEDBACK

WRAP-UP

20 minutes Helmets are returned, and volunteers help participants to untack. Treats are given to horses, participants take a break/get snack, and group reflection follows. All participating in the session are thanked.

INSTRUCTOR REFLECTION

- How did the girls do today?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

VOLUNTEER REFLECTION

- How did the girl you worked with do today?
- What's something you will remember about any/all of the girls?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION

- What will you tell someone else about today?
- How does it feel to work with such a big animal?
- What do you notice about your horse that you didn't notice last time?
- How did you bond more with your horse today?
- What's something you learned or want to know?

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

Integrated Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (IEAT)
6300 Princeton Road, Firth, NE 68358
<http://www.horsesforhealingne.org>

SET-UP

- 3 instructors, 4 volunteers
- 4 horses (not saddled)
- Grooming buckets
- Eggs, spoons, games, cones

EQUINE OBJECTIVE

Participants will practice neck reining and trot for short distances in both directions around the arena with assistance.

NOTES

SESSION 3

PREP

20 MINUTES Participants are greeted, play an introductory game (true/false on index cards), and volunteers assist them with helmets, grooming buckets and saddling. Instructors circulate and connect, teaching vocabulary (i.e., hoof, mane) and checking tack. Participants mount horses with assistance as needed.

WARM-UP

15 MINUTES Volunteers lead horses, instructors facilitate breathing exercises and stretches (helicopter, hands on head, neck stretches, twisting toward tail, swinging legs, standing in stirrups, closing eyes, opposite hands/arms) in both directions. Emphasis is placed on participant connecting with body while walking, 4 beats in the gait, and posture.

Participants practice walk-halt-walk transitions (red light-green light) adding (purple light-blue light).

LESSON

45 MINUTES Instructors teach neck reining and participants practice by playing red-green-purple-blue light.

Participants play egg and spoon on horseback with focus on controlling the speed and direction of their horse with one hand.

Instructors demonstrate and teach trotting, working with participants one-on-one. Participants then are allowed to try with assistance beginning with only a few strides and working their way to trot longer amounts of time as they feel comfortable.

As a group, participants play leap frog trotting working toward more independence and control.

20 MINUTES Games set up and participants are given free riding time. They may choose to play or practice skills.

WRAP-UP

20 minutes Helmets are returned, and volunteers help participants to untack. Treats are given to horses, participants take a break/get snack, and group reflection follows. All participating in the session are thanked.

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

Integrated Equestrian-Assisted Therapy (IEAT)
6300 Princeton Road, Firth, NE 68358
<http://www.horsesforhealingne.org>

OTHER FEEDBACK

INSTRUCTOR REFLECTION

- How would you say each of the girls interacted today with their horse?
- Were there any important moments today?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

VOLUNTEER REFLECTION

- What was the best part of today for you?
- How would you say each of the girls interacted today with their horse?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION

- What will you tell someone else about today?
- What do you notice about your horse that you didn't notice last time?
- What's something that you liked doing today?
- How does being a friend apply to your relationship with your horse?
- What are you learning from the horses? Why is this important?
- What's something you learned about someone else here?
- What's something you learned or want to know?

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

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SET-UP

- 3 instructors, 4 volunteers
- 6 horses (not saddled)
- Grooming buckets
- Finger paint
- Washing supplies

EQUINE OBJECTIVE

Participants will be able to count/feel their horse's gait at the walk. Participants will be able to ride independently at a trot down both the long sides of the arena.

NOTES

SESSION 4

PREP AND SPECIAL ACTIVITY

20 MINUTES Participants are greeted and greet the horses. They spend extra time brushing, grooming, and saddling the horses with the help of volunteers and instructors.

20 MINUTES With the support of instructors and volunteers, participants are invited to ride at a walk bareback. Volunteers lead horses and instructors facilitate breathing exercises and stretches (helicopter, hands on head, neck stretches, twisting toward tail, swinging legs) in both directions. Emphasis is placed on participant connecting with body while walking, 4 beats in the gait, and posture. If comfortable, they are invited to close their eyes. Later, if interested, they are invited to trot for a few strides.

LESSON

20 MINUTES Participants mount and stretch on their assigned horse. Red/green light; leap frog trotting, and pattern work follows.

20 MINUTES Participants take a group trail ride outside.

WRAP-UP AND SPECIAL ACTIVITY

10 MINUTES Helmets are returned and volunteers help participants to untack. Treats are given to horses.

20 MINUTES Participants paint and later wash a horse together.

10 MINUTES Participants reflect together as a group and eat snack. All participating in the session are thanked.

Appendix F: IEAT Sessions



EQUINE ENCOUNTERS

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OTHER FEEDBACK

INSTRUCTOR REFLECTION

- How would you say each of the girls interacted today with their horse?
- Were there any important moments today?
- What do you think is the most important part of the program?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

VOLUNTEER REFLECTION

- Why do you think this program is helpful for the girls?
- What were some moments today that were important to you?
- What were some moments today that were important for the girls?
- What are some other comments or thoughts about today's session?

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION

- What was the best part about today for you?
- What will you remember about this program?
- What do you think about working with and riding horses?
- What's something you learned from this program?
- How can you or have you applied what you've learned to your lives at school, with family, etc.?
- When did you start to trust your horse?
- What's something else you want to share?