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Chapter

Resilience and Migration: Iranians Living in Australia

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Abstract

Migration is often a challenging and stressful experience but there is significant variation in the response of individuals to migration-related challenges. This study investigated factors that contribute to resilience among Iranians living in Australia and the relationship between resilience, migration, and socio-demographic variables. Data was collected from 182 Iranian immigrants and refugees. This study used a mixed-method design comprised of an online questionnaire and 12 semi-structured interviews. Lower levels of resilience were found among individuals who had experienced higher levels of discrimination compared to those who had experienced moderate levels ($p < 0.05$). Refugees reported lower levels of resilience and a higher experience of discrimination than immigrants ($p < 0.05$). Interview findings reveal the two main themes that contributed to resilience, which were protective factors including personal and social competencies, social and family support, and longer duration in Australia and risk factors such as unemployment, discrimination, and loneliness. Several possible approaches to assist immigrants and refugees are suggested, including strategies that could lessen the challenges of the migration process and enhance protective factors associated with resilience.

Keywords: resilience, migration and socio-demographic variables, Iranian immigrants and refugees, mixed methods

1. Introduction

The experience of migration is often an active process of changes and challenges with significant variation in the response of individuals to migration. The challenges of migration might result in poor outcomes for individuals who with lower resilience respond to change in passive or inflexible ways [1, 2], while for people with high resilience, migration might result in a positive outcome as they see this experience as an opportunity for growth [3, 4]. Although there is a lack of consensus about the definition and measurement of resilience, most researchers agree that it is a dynamic, complex, and multidimensional and that it is associated with positive developmental pathways [5]. Because of this lack of consensus any study of resilience needs to define how the concept is being used. In the context of migration, resilience can be seen as “a process of reinforcement of emotion, sociability and liveliness that reflects elastic

integration within a new environment of networks and collaborations” ([6], p. 8). A framework has previously been developed to understand resilience within the process of migration, highlighting the importance of challenges to prepare immigrants to deal with stressors of the migration journey. Since both the migration experience and resilience are multidimensional and dynamic, a conceptual focus on features of the process that facilitate adaptation to adverse experiences is needed [7–11].

Although extensive research on immigrants and refugees has been conducted across a broad range of disciplines [2, 12], there has been limited study of the factors that contribute to resilience among Iranian populations in Australia, which is the focus of the present study. Specifically, this paper first explores the challenges experienced by Iranian immigrants and refugees living in Australia and the strategies they employ to maintain their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being. An examination of the relationship between resilience and migration among members of this immigrant community follows, including English language proficiency, migration expectation, migration category, duration of residence in Australia, discrimination experiences, and socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, education and occupation). Elucidating the resiliency processes that aid Iranians in Australia can inform social and personal adjustment, transition and support services, and policy.

2. Method

This study used a mixed methods design: an online survey and semi-structured interviews to examine the relationship between migration experience and resilience, and to generate a clearer understanding of the context and the processes that influence resilience and migration of Iranians living in Australia.

Survey questionnaires are reliant on the scales comprising them [13] and the particular social and cultural norms of Iranian culture might not be captured from the survey. Moreover, although the survey provides evidence of patterns of resilience influences of Iranian populations in Australia, interviews deliver additional insight into the migration process and offer the flexibility to explore factors related to migration processes of Iranians in Australia that the researchers might not have thought of when developing the questionnaire. This present study is a component of a larger project with approval obtained for all data collection activities from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Melbourne (Ethics approved number, 1137189).

3. Data collection

3.1 Online survey

Iranian immigrants and refugees living in Australia over 18 years of age and able to communicate in English or Farsi were invited to participate in the study. In 2012–2013, approximately 900 invitations to participate in the online survey were sent by 17 Iranian non-government organisations across Australia that were recognised through professional networks, an online search, and snowballing.

Participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire which included questions about resilience and their migration experience. Participation was voluntary, and the survey was available in both English and Farsi. Participants were free to respond in their preferred language.

3.2 In-depth interviews

A subset of 12 individuals (six men and six women) who completed the online survey also agreed to be re-contacted later for an interview. These participants were chosen for semi-structured interviews based on a range of different factors, including age, gender, and the duration of their residence in Australia. All interviews were completed in 2013, with nine interviews administered in Farsi and three interviews in English. All interviews conducted in Farsi were translated into English and checked for consistency by an Iranian volunteer. Eight interviews were completed face to face at the University of Melbourne or in the participants' home, while four interviews were completed by phone because participants either lived in a city other than Melbourne or preferred to be interviewed in this way. Eight interviews were tape recorded with participants' permission and manually transcribed immediately after interviewing, with the transcripts checked against the tapes for accuracy. Four interviewees did not agree to be taped during the interview because of political and cultural sensitivities; thus, interview data was collected using note taking.

4. Measurement

4.1 Online survey

This study utilised two measures: the Migration and Settlement Questionnaire (MASQ), and the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA). The Migration and Settlement Questionnaire [14] was translated into Farsi language for this study and has two main parts: socio-demographic variables and migration variables. The MASQ questions were translated by the principal researcher, who is a native Farsi speaker, and back-translated by a volunteer, who is fluent in Farsi. The MASQ translations also were checked for consistency by another volunteer who is fluent in Farsi. The MASQ is easy to understand and written in everyday language. However, the MASQ had not previously been validated in Iranian populations [15].

The Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) is a validated self-report scale (33 items) that measures resilience factors in adults [16]. It includes five subscales of resilience: Personal Competency, 10 items ($\alpha = 0.79$) that measure self-confidence and particularly the ability to plan; Structured Style, four items ($\alpha = 0.74$) that measure preference for having and following routines; Social Competence, six items ($\alpha = 0.84$) that measure the level of social skill, warmth, and flexibility; Family Cohesion, six items ($\alpha = 0.77$) that measure the degree to which values are shared with the participant's family; and Social Resources, seven items ($\alpha = 0.69$) that measure the availability of social support [16]. The RSA items are rated using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The RSA was previously translated and validated into Farsi and has shown good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$) with an Iranian sample [17]. Cronbach's Alpha values of the full scale (Total Resilience) and its subscales in this study ($N = 182$) were Personal Competency ($\alpha = 0.93$), Structured Style ($\alpha = 0.79$), Social Competence ($\alpha = 0.89$), Family Cohesion ($\alpha = 0.88$), Social Resources ($\alpha = 0.90$), and Total Resilience ($\alpha = 0.84$).

4.2 In-depth interviews

The two measures (RSA and MASQ) used in the online survey formed the basic framework for the interview questions including which guided the qualitative

component of the study and included two sets of questions and probes (See [6] for more details). The questions were open-ended semi-structured enabling participants to share their migration experience and re-settling in Australia. After a brief acknowledgment and conversation about the study, the interviews began with an overall question - Would you like to tell me any surprising or unexpected things about Australia? This general question let the participants to frame their migration experience from their perspective, allowing for follow-up queries and probes that expanded upon their experience.

5. Analytic procedures

5.1 Online survey

SPSS-22 was used for the analysis of survey data. Pearson's correlations, independent-samples t-test, one-way ANOVAs, and Post Hoc analyses were utilised to test for bivariate associations between resilience and each migration and socio-demographic variables.

5.2 In-depth interviews

Interviews were converted to rich-text files and imported into NVivo (version 10), a computer-based qualitative data analysis program. Consistent with the recommendations of the data were analysed using a theoretical approach to explore codes central to the research hypotheses and to complement and extend the quantitative findings. To generate themes, all codes that emerged from the analysis were checked against each other and were studied to determine the ways in which they were related and to form sub-themes, with some themes created from these sub-themes. Again, final themes were verified for consistency. The process continued and led to the identification of main themes [6].

6. Results

6.1 Online survey

Iranians living across Australia completed the online survey ($n = 182$); 54% males and 46% females, with a mean age of 37 years ($SD = 9.23$; range: 19–62 years). The mean duration of residence in Australia was 8 years ($SD = 6.40$; range: 1–40 years), and 20% of participants were refugees. **Table 1** provides details on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Findings suggest higher levels of resilience in the domain of personal competency among study participants. The Mean, Standard Deviation, and Confidence Interval for resilience domains are presented in **Table 2**.

When the mean scores of the resilience domains were compared to an Iranian sample [373 of undergraduate Iranian university students (232 females and 141 males, between 19 and 26 years, $M = 20.6$, $SD = 1.4$) [17], there were significant differences between mean scores of family cohesion domain (**Figure 1**). This outcome might be clarified by the extensive family closeness as a feature of Iranian study, which is much less prevalent in the post-immigration context.

Variables	Total N (%)	Immigrant n (%)	Refugee n (%)	M(SD)
Age (range 19–62)				
≤24	13 (7)	10 (7)	3 (8)	37.00 (9.23)
25–31	41 (23)	35 (24)	6 (16)	
32–38	56 (31)	49 (34)	7 (19)	
39–45	37 (20)	30 (21)	7 (19)	
46+	35 (19)	21 (14)	14 (38)	
Year live in Australia (range 1–40)	<i>Mdn</i> = 6			
<5 years	75 (41)	67 (46)	8 (22)	8.00 (6.40)
5–11 years	67 (37)	54 (37)	13 (35)	
11–16 years	25 (14)	15 (10)	10 (27)	
>16 years	15 (8)	9 (6)	6 (16)	
Gender				
Male	99 (54)	75 (65)	24 (52)	
Female	83 (46)	70 (35)	13 (48)	
Marital status				
Married/Defacto	122 (67)	109 (75)	13 (35)	
Unmarried	49 (27)	32 (22)	17 (46)	
Divorced/Widowed	11 (6)	4 (3)	7 (19)	
Migration category				
Immigrant	145 (80)			
Refugee ^a	37 (20)			
Education				
Tertiary complete	121 (66)	109 (76)	11 (29)	
Tertiary incomplete	45 (25)	31 (21)	15 (41)	
School qualification ^b	16 (9)	5 (3)	11 (30)	
Occupation				
Employed	108 (59)	85 (59)	23 (63)	
Unemployed	43 (24)	35 (24)	8 (22)	
Student	31 (17)	25 (17)	25 (15)	

^aTheir reason for being refugee was political, social, or family reunion.
^bHigh school completed (*n* = 13), high school not completed (*n* = 3).

Table 1.Socio-demographic characteristics of the Participants (*N* = 182).

Total resilience score was significantly higher among immigrants ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.46$) than refugees ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.56$; $t(180) = -2.98$, $p = 0.003$). Statistically significant correlations were found between resilience and marital status ($r = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$) using the Tukey HSD test, while there were no significant differences among marital status categories of married, never married and divorced (Table 3).

	Personal competency (10 items)	Structured style (4 items)	Social competence (6 items)	Family cohesion (6 items)	Social resource (7 items)
Mean	37.37	14.69	22.25	23.24	26.00
Std. Deviation	5.72	2.40	4.06	3.65	4.68
Confidence interval for the mean	36.54, 38.20	14.34, 15.04	21.66, 22.84	22.71, 23.77	25.32, 26.68

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and confidence interval for resilience domains, Where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree.

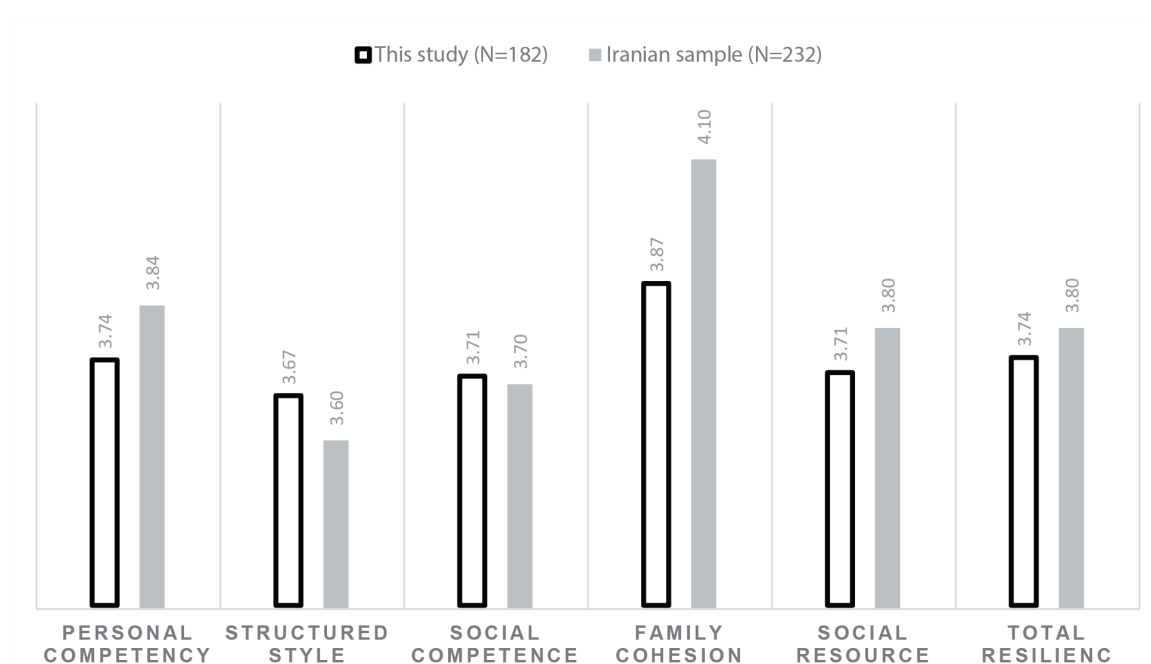


Figure 1. Mean scores for the domains of resilience in this present study, an Iranian sample in Australia, compared to an Iranian sample in Iran [17], where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

There was a small but significant correlation between the total resilience and education scores ($r = 0.17, p < 0.05$). Using the Tukey HSD test, there were no significant differences between the education categories of tertiary complete, tertiary incomplete, and school qualification.

There was slightly significant negative association between total resilience and discrimination ($r = -0.17, p = 0.019$). Applying the Tukey HSD test, participants who suffered higher levels of discrimination reported lower scores in total resilience compared to participants who felt moderate levels of discrimination ($MD = 0.19, p = 0.3; [-0.38, 0.01]$). In addition, refugees reported higher levels of discrimination than immigrants ($t_{180} = 2.39, p = 0.18$). Relationships between resilience domains and migration variables are presented in **Table 4**.

6.2 In-depth interviews

Four participants were refugees; with half of the interviewees having lived in Australia for more than 10 years. Seven of the interviewees were married and lived

Socio-demographic and migration variables	Resilience
	<i>r</i>
Age	0.00
Gender	0.04
Duration of residence in Australia	0.00
Migration category	
Refugee ₁	0.22**
Immigrant ₂	
Marital status	
Married/Defacto ₁	-0.15*
Divorced/Widowed ₂	
Unmarried ₃	
Education	
School qualification ₁	0.17*
Tertiary incomplete ₂	
Tertiary complete ₃	
Employment	0.14
Migration expectation	0.08
Discrimination	-0.19**
English language proficiency	0.06

***P* < 0.01, **P* < 0.05, *P* < 0.05, ***P* < 0.001.

Table 3.
 Individual correlations between socio-demographic and migration variables and resilience.

Age group	Gender	Having child	Language speaks at home	Marital status	Migration category	Occupation	Years living in Australia	Methods of interviewing
46+	Male	No	Persian/English	Single	Refugee	Employed	10–40	Face to face interview*
39–45	Male	Yes	Persian/English	Married	Immigrant	Unemployed	1–10	Face to face interview*
<24	Female	No	Persian/English	Single	Immigrant	Student	1–10	Face to face interview*
39–45	Male	Yes	Persian/English/Turkish	Married	Immigrant	Employed	10–40	Phone interview**
32–38	Male	Yes	Persian/English	Married	Immigrant	Employed	1–10	Phone interview**
46+	Male	Yes	Persian/English/Turkish	Married	Immigrant	Employed	10–40	Face to face interview**
32–38	Female	Yes	Persian/English	Married	Immigrant	Employed	1–10	Phone interview**

Age group	Gender	Having child	Language speaks at home	Marital status	Migration category	Occupation	Years living in Australia	Methods of interviewing
46+	Female	Yes	Persian/English/Turkish	Married	Immigrant	Unemployed	10–40	Face to face interview**
46+	Male	Yes	Persian/English/Turkish	Married	Refugee	Employed	10–40	Face to face interview**
39–45	Female	Yes	Persian/English/Kurdish	Divorced	Refugee	Employed	10–40	Face to face interview*
<24	Female	Yes	Persian/English	Divorced	Refugee	Unemployed	1–10	Face to face interview**

*Note writing because interviewees did not agree to tape recording of the interview due to political and cultural sensitivities.

**Audio record.

Table 4.
Characteristics of Interviewees (N = 11).

with their spouse and children, while two were divorced, and two were single. Although three interviewees were unemployed, all were concerned about their job security (Table 4).

Interview findings are structured in this section to reflect the broad domains of Immigration Category, Education, and Discrimination as the significant outcome from the online survey.

7. Immigration

All immigrants and refugees interviewed in this study revealed that while they were contented with their life in Australia, their separation from family members, friends, and even country (mainly for refugees) influence their identity, psychosocial life, and experience. The physical and geographical distance from relatives had a negative impact with the grief of separation and emotional suffering. Moreover, unmarried and young interviewees reported how the absence of relatives and family led to profound feelings of loneliness:

“I am far from my extended family, friends; my childhood place [came to tears]. It is not easy to forget my country. All my values are there. My identity is there. Sometimes I feel my body is out of blood. I talk to my self why I am here. I am searching for my identity.”

Male, Refugee

“It is very hard...it is because my family are not here. I think the only challenge that I have is my loneliness. I feel so lonely.”

Young Male, Refugee

“The relationship that you could have with your family, you could not find with anybody else...”

Female, Refugee

Though, married individuals who live with their family in Australia experience much higher levels of satisfaction than unmarried participants or those whose family (nuclear and extended) live in Iran. The presence of family was consistently reported as an important source of support and stability:

“If I have any issues my family are the first ones who will support and help me. Knowing that my family is in Australia makes me feel more confident and comfortable.”

Female, Immigrant

Issues of social isolation were reported by interviewees, particularly younger participants.

“I have become a little more isolated from society. I used to talk with my friends nearly every day in Iran, but here, I am not able to find somebody who I can confide in. My parents have also become lonely here.”

Young female, Immigrant

Feelings of frustration and a profound feeling of discontent in Australia after several negative post-migration experiences were revealed by interviewees.

“Some Australians and most Iranians look at me in a bad way, especially when I have my Hijab on. When I was wearing the Hijab, I was struggling. I tried my best to be nice and friendly to everyone, but I could still feel that people were judging me because I wore a Hijab...”

Female, Immigrant

A common challenge for younger participants reflects the concerns of Iranian parents around social and cultural differences and impact on their communication with their children:

“...communication with my kids is a major issue for us [in Australia] as the social and cultural situation is very different from the situation in Iran. I understand that in the modern world we need to let kids decide for themselves, but in reality, it is not as easy as they do not have enough experience. I am worried about the future of my kids in Australia. This country gave children lots of freedom and I do not have a good feeling about that...I am really worried about the future of my kids.”

Male, Immigrant

Iranian parent interviewees were more concern for the challenges faced by their young daughters who might be more vulnerable:

“My daughter is a social person. She always wants to go out, and because I came from a different culture ... I am very upset about it and worry ...”

Male, Immigrant

One young woman provided insight into her experience of these issues and her parents have adapted and are becoming more flexible in their approach.

“They [my parents] used to be very strict with me, especially my dad. However, they have become a little easier...”

Female, Immigrant

Finding themselves away from extended family care nets, Iranian parents who both were working and were not always emotionally and/or physically available to their children revealed worries over proper supervision of their offspring. They declared feeling of guilt about the relationship with their children and that they had less time available for parenting, social activities with their children and social life due to working longer hours since moving to Australia:

“Unfortunately, when we came here with nothing, we were busy with our life, job and other things ... if I were back 20 years ago I probably would cut some of the activities that I had before and I would sacrifice that and spend more time with my kids...”

Male, Refugee

Younger age at the time of immigration revealed to be helpful in adjusting to the post-migration challenges by a few participants.

“I think the age of coming [to Australia] ... is important. If you come at a younger age, even after finishing high school, it is still faster to adapt. I can see this in my network.”

Male, Immigrant

8. Education

Survey results identified that participants who had completed tertiary educational qualifications had a higher level of resilience than those who had not completed tertiary education. Interviewees discussed their many difficulties focusing on the lack of recognition of their qualifications. Higher levels of education pre-migration did not guarantee suitable employment, and this was a common challenge.

“I have friends, who are engineers with years of experience and who are here working as cleaners and mopping floors. This is a person’s maximum waste of time, energy, capabilities and experience. Ultimately, they will not be able to settle down in Australia. After years of continuous labour work, they will either have to return to their country or stay here and struggle. In some circumstances, they will even face psychological issues.”

Male, Immigrant

Feelings of regret and disgrace for not completing their university education or achieving qualifications revealed by a few interviewees:

“After seven years, I am embarrassed to tell my family and friends back in Iran that I was not able to finish my study. I must hide this issue from them. My parents will be upset with me and others might laugh at me.”

Male, Immigrant

9. Discrimination

The survey results revealed that participants experienced some discrimination, particularly about religion and nationality while living in Australia. Interviewees also described how experiences of discrimination in Australia impacted their emotional states:

“I contacted a company for their advertisement...he asked me where you are from...I am from Iran, and he replied oh, my God f... terrorist... I was shocked... but I considered that as a joke and we laugh together... he asked me to call him later in 10 minutes... so I called him three times after 10 minutes, and he did not reply... at that stage, I felt heavy and disappointed... I only wanted to tell him that I am not a terrorist but certainly, you are, as you destroyed my spirit ...”

Male, Immigrant

“An Australian gentleman tried to help me with the pram. Unexpectedly his wife yelled why are you helping her? Do not you see she wears a Hijab? Do not you see? She is a Muslim. I found that quite outrageous and painful. I was shocked to such an extent that I did not know what to do... I got off..., I cried... at that moment, I really felt disheartened...”

Female, Immigrant

Several participants reported feelings of unease after various negative post-migration experiences about their Hijab and particularly discrimination against women who wear the Hijab by Iranian community in Australia which pointed out by both male and female interviewees:

“Iranians are sensitive to Hijab because for some Iranians it represents a social, religious and political symbol... They combine Hijab, religion, politics and everything and at the end they come to a negative conclusion. From Australians; however, I do not think there is as much pressure as the individual feels.”

Male, Immigrant

“Here at my school, when I had Hijab on, Muslim girls from other countries did not like me because my hair was showing...”

Female, Refugee

“Some Australians and most Iranians look at me in a bad way, especially when I have my Hijab on. When I was wearing Hijab, I was struggling. I tried my best to be nice and friendly to everyone, but I could still feel that people were judging me because I wore a Hijab...”

Young female, Immigrant

One interviewee described how observing the discrimination experiences of others negatively impacted upon her own emotions:

“I witnessed that someone being treated differently... these types of incidents made me feel unaccepted and unloved...” [Came to tears].

Young female, Immigrant

Young female immigrant also highlighted how a negative experience at school could have a profound impact on her emotional well-being:

“I had a high positive view about school environments in Australia before I came here from a standard high school in Iran. However, I received a worse welcome from staff in my school... I felt alone and isolated most of the time...my school manager was so rude to me... a few months after, a German girl and a Japanese girl joined our school. They were at the centre of attention and were treated completely different from the other kids and me ... my school manager was very nice to them ... I was totally upset...” [Came to tears].

A few interviewees were frustrated with how the law and rights of citizens were applied differently:

“I am a citizen of this country; however, my rights as a citizen are sometimes uncertain...the dual politics with regards to issuing visitor’s visa for our families are quite confusing and unfair. For example, as a citizen, I cannot bring my family here except for emergency or serious circumstances.”

Male, Immigrant

10. Discussion

Migration for any reason is often a challenging and life-changing experience. However, the experience can provide opportunities for growth and resilience [18]. There are challenges but there are also emotional, social and cultural resources that can have a positive impact on the process of adaptation [7, 12, 19–23]. The mixed methods design (in which the survey was administered first, followed by the interviews) provides insight into the processes that influence resilience related to the migration of Iranian immigrants and refugees in Australia. There were some survey results that required additional explanation. For example, more detail was needed on issues that relate to the discrimination following post-migration.

These results reveal both protective and risk factors associated with resilience of Iranian immigrants and refugees in Australia. These are derived from the impact of

the process and pre- and post- experiences of migration and its related challenges. Findings also highlight the association between socio-demographic and migration variables and resilience. The results demonstrate that Iranian immigrants and refugees struggle with many emotional, cultural and economic challenges in Australia, leading to a range of outcomes from prolonged difficulties to increased levels of resilience [24–27].

Notably, resilience was higher among immigrants than refugees. This needs to be further explored in future research with the current findings limited due to the small number of refugee participants in this study. However, this pattern might be due to the traumatic experiences and situations that forced the migration of refugees, and the inability to return to their country of origin. Approximately four in every 10 refugee and humanitarian arrivals in Australia have suffered torture and trauma before arrival [28–30]. Studies have found that the freedom to choose to migrate provides adequate time for immigrants to plan their migration [9, 12, 31, 32]. The grief of separation or other distressing experiences, such as a poorly planned migration process [33], or discrimination and a lack of welcome from their local community, can influence the well-being of immigrants in general, and refugees in particular, as was highlighted in this study. Furthermore, for many, if not most, refugees this is compounded with waiting many months and sometimes years in detention centres in Australia or United Nations refugees' camps. It has been well documented that extreme distress can have an adverse influence on resilience [34, 35]. Ongoing issues of uncertainty over refugee status could add more stress to the lives of refugees. Research indicates that repeated experiences of uncontrollable or overwhelming stress in some people might lead to feelings of vulnerability and helplessness, and a belief that it is impossible to change an adverse situation [36]. However, individual variability in how to respond to stressful situations depends on numerous psychological, social and cultural risk and protective factors [37].

Though some people who constantly experience challenges can maintain their well-being, others are more vulnerable to their life circumstances and might be more inclined to experience unpleasant consequences because of their environments and living conditions and/or genetic predisposition [38–43].

This situation can arise from traumatic pre-migration experiences and unpleasant post-migration experiences, such as experiencing higher levels of discrimination and being unemployed.

A number of researchers have shown that some refugees suffer from migration-related stress and problems in adapting to a new community, while others have found that the mental health of some refugees was improved after being in Australia for a number of years, even if they had experienced significant trauma [44]. Living in a secure environment, in which one may receive support and have the opportunity to achieve lifetime aspirations and goals are two forms of experience that have a powerful influence on the establishment of self-esteem and self-efficacy [45].

Supportive individual relationships are essential for strengthening positive concepts and providing individuals with the confidence to enable successful coping with adversity. Consistent with previous research this study found that the support of family in the form of marriage is one of the most important social resources for people, considering that they can rely on others care if needed [12, 46]. The results of this study show a significant difference between the mean scores of family cohesion resilience in comparison with the Iranian sample (Jowkar et al. [17]). A possible explanation might be the proximity of the extended family as a feature of the Iranian study, which is much less common in post-immigration conditions. In Iranian culture

family support seems to be a protective factor throughout life [47, 48]. Social support in the form of family support is one of the most important supports post-migration for Iranian immigrants and refugees in Australia.

Results also reveal a bi-directional relationship between resilience factors and employment in which resilient people appear to be more eager to find employment and not give up seeking a job, which makes them more likely to engage in a suitable occupation. In turn, this increases an individual's ability to establish strong social support networks that encourage them to be more involved in social activities and enjoy their life, thereby enhancing their resilience to migration distress. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating the protective role of employment on people's well-being [49, 50]. The level of education and occupational background might also be a risk factor affecting immigrants. This study showed that the qualifications of many Iranians were not recognised in Australia, which is one of the critical reasons why the rate of unemployment is high in this population compared to the general population in Australia [51]. Interviewees reveal that immigrants who are highly qualified, as well as those without any employment experience or sufficient education, encounter more difficulties in gaining suitable employment. This finding is similar to other research demonstrating the problems in obtaining adequate work for this group of immigrants [52].

Consistent with other research, this study reveals that higher education by advancing flexibility and self-confidence helps Iranians in the process of migration and settlement [9, 53, 54]. Though, higher education attainment linked to unmet expectations was stressful for Iranians post-migration. They expected to get a suitable work tailored to their educational background, but for many this was not the case. This was highlighted by most interviewees, as noted by one participant: "... *it was emotionally tough... to forget all of my qualification*". Likewise, for Iranians with higher educational background, the loss of the social status they enjoyed in Iran is significant. Reciprocally, for some Iranian immigrants and refugees continuing to study at a higher level in Australia and increasing your education brings more benefits. These provide opportunities for individuals to build active social networks, advance their English language proficiency, learn about Australian law and rights, and understand their rights and status in the new society.

This seems to be a supportive factor for Iranian refugees and immigrants in Australia and is consistent with other studies [19, 20, 55–57]. However, an investigation into these issues is limited by the cross-sectional nature of this study. Further longitudinal research is necessary to gain a better understanding of these relationships.

Moreover, the qualitative component of this study reveals how Australia's social and cultural flexibility serves Iranian immigrants and refugees well in the process of adapting to life in Australia, and how being able to communicate in English, which is a central requirement for a better settlement and meaningful employment in Australia was associated with resilience. Interviewees highlight the importance of having a good knowledge of the English language for successfully adapting in Australia, especially for their employment prospects. Results suggest that the ability to communicate in English assists immigrants and refugees in enhancing their relationship with the new community, recreating social ties, seeking social support, and finding suitable and meaningful employment. This in turn improves confidence and self-esteem that is crucial for the development of personal and social competencies as significant factors that contribute to resilience, as demonstrated by this study.

Present findings indicate that experiencing high levels of discrimination was associated with reduced levels of resilience among Iranian immigrants and refugees. This

outcome extends previous refugee research to immigrant samples, and is consistent with other immigrant communities research [33, 34, 58, 59]. It is well documented that exposure to multiple sources of stress and discomfort, for instance high levels of discrimination, can negatively affect self-esteem and lead to decreased well-being, which can impair resilience [34, 35]. It should be acknowledged that individuals have diverse reactions to stressful situations, which is dependent on numerous emotional, social and cultural factors. Individuals also evaluate situations in a different way based on their belief systems, expectations, personalities, and earlier experiences. For instance, a similar event of discrimination might harm one and not the other, although for some individuals even witnessing discrimination might affect their well-being, as emphasised in this research and revealed by the following interviewee's notes: "*I saw that somebody being treated differently...I felt unloved and so worthless... thinking that Australians in no way would like me*".

Both survey and interview findings reveal that almost all participants in this study experienced discrimination in Australia, particularly in terms of their nationality and religion. Some participants revealed unfairness experience from their local community, which profoundly impacted upon their well-being. Such experiences could damage personal and social relationships and confidence, and lead to social isolation through unpredictability, ambiguity, and fear of ridicule by members of one's community [60, 61]. Nevertheless, findings of this study show that in cases where there is a risk of discrimination, there are also social and personal resources that could protect Iranians from these prejudices, such as a sense of humour, spirituality, social competency, supportive familial relationships and friendships, and personal growth through previous experience of discrimination. Studies have shown that individuals need some life challenges to cope more efficiently [45, 62]. Most participants in this study felt responsible to take steps to advance their coping strategies by using existing support networks and expanding their strengths to respond to the stress of discrimination. Though this study focuses on the impact of the experience of discrimination after Iranian immigration, it looks like personal growth due to earlier experiences of discrimination in their home country has served them post-migration.

It has been well documented that challenging situations offer a prospect for change and growth.

Wald, Taylor, Asmundson, Jang, & Stapleton [63] and that exposure to moderate levels of stress could enhance a person's resilience and thus prepare them for better dealing with the next challenges they might face during life [7, 8, 11, 21, 23, 45, 64–67]. Nonetheless, while personal growth through previous experience of discrimination appears to aid Iranian refugees to deal with the post-migration challenges, experiencing quite high levels of discrimination clearly damages their social and personal relationships, and leads to distrust and social isolation, which in turn leads to declining levels of resilience. This was found in both the survey and interview data from this study.

11. Limitations

This study has limitations that should be reflected on when interpreting the findings. Causality cannot be assumed due to the cross-sectional nature of the study design as well as the small number of interviewees. Thus, the present study design limits a complete understanding of the dynamic mechanisms of migration and resilience over time. Also, the cross-sectional data limits the understanding of resilience as a vigorous process that functions at neurobiological, genetic, individual and social

levels [9]. Thus, further research is needed to investigate the topic comprehensively. However, although the study was cross-sectional, the mixed-method design helped validate and endorse the study findings.

The methods employed to recruit participants relied on the active involvement of Iranian community organisations and the interest of Iranians in Australia voluntarily participate in the study. The use of convenience sampling also limits generalizability to the population at large. In addition, as we only had a small number of refugees who participated (20%), findings regarding this group of immigrants need further replication. Participants responded in English and Farsi, and although we believe this did not result in any significant differences that would influence the findings, there is always the possibility that some of the interpretations of questions/concepts might be different depending upon the language of participants.

12. Conclusion

Since both migration and resilience are intertwined with change and challenges, and are multidimensional and active processes, understanding factors that enhance resilience within the context of migration processes is vital for successful adaptation. Features such as level of education in combination with the ability to communicate in English, preparation for migration, family support, and personal growth through previous experience of discrimination, all assist Iranian immigrants and refugees in shaping their relationship with the new community. Seeking social support and recreating social ties, as well as finding meaningful employment are important strategic activities which develop confidence that is vital for improving social and personal competencies. Together, these significant factors contribute to resilience and were endorsed by both survey and interview results in this study. Although migration is a challenging and stressful experience, interviewees reveal that Iranians integrate and adjust better by utilising their resources such as spirituality, sense of humour, social support, understanding of the Australian culture, and engaging in Iranian cultural and Australian multicultural practices. Thus, suggested activities that interviewees cited to help them cope with the migration experience such as spending time with friends, listening to music, seeking family support, and pursuing social support might promote resilience among this population. Other researchers are encouraged to pursue these themes through additional research. Also, since research on resilience among immigrants and refugees is scant, additional research needs to be conducted to further explore the resilience factors among refugees and younger family members. This study highlights the need for further research to assess whether interventions that strengthen resilience can reduce migration distress and promote positive outcomes for Iranians as well as other immigrant communities living in Australia.

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Deceleration of interest

This study is a part of the author's PhD thesis, which was completed at The University of Melbourne [6].

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