

Career Development Barriers in the Post-Settlement Phase amongst Women Refugees: Implications for Human Capital Development

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Abstract

South Africa has witnessed an increase in the number of refugees in the country. This could be due to the country being perceived favourably especially by refugees from the African continent. This study investigates the career development barriers affecting women refugees in the post-settlement phase and further ascertains the implications that these can have on human capital development. Calls have been made within extant literature to focus on the impact of the global refugee crisis and its implications for the career opportunities and experiences of refugees. A qualitative research approach was utilised based on the narratives and stories of 20 women refugees operating in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Two main findings were found based on the data analysis. First, a range of barriers that relate to individual and contextual factors were found to affect refugees post-settlement. Second, the interacting nature of these barriers is illustrated and shown to affect individual agency as refugee women focus on the acquisition of basic commodities rather than long-term human capital development. The research suggests strategies that policymakers can adopt to assist women refugees not just with their career development but also integration in the host country. This study extends and advances the literature on the career development issues relating to vulnerable groups such as women refugees, particularly in developing nations such as South Africa. Further, the study makes suggestions for practice with wider ramifications that can assist women refugees during the post-settlement phase.

Keywords: women; refugees; gender; career development; barriers

Introduction

The complex patterns of migration as a result of fleeing violence and persecution in one's home country have major implications for refugees' career development (Pajic et al. 2018). Refugees encounter adversity in their career development adjustments when they arrive in host countries, and find it difficult to secure employment, with the majority of them often settling in lower skilled positions than their qualifications and experience merit (Wehrle et al. 2018). Lack of human capital development, i.e. lack of education, inadequate training, and language proficiency, is often seen as the major barrier to employment when they arrive in host countries (Pajic et al. 2018). Prominently, within the South African context, local citizens perceive the presence of immigrants (including refugees) as a threat to their jobs and the social services granted by the government (Gordon 2015) and ultimately they are subjected to xenophobic attacks (Solomon and Kosaka 2013) and this affects their integration into the host country.

Although most immigrants often encounter restrictions to obtain formal employment due to immigration-related factors such as lack of familial support, xenophobia and language barriers, women refugees are perceived to be the most vulnerable populace of the immigrant workforce (Brane and Wang 2013; UNHCR, UNFPA, and WRC 2016). They are a group of distinct migrant women who carry stressors and stigmas associated with being a migrant, a refugee and a woman (Brane and Wang 2013). The barriers they encounter when trying to enter the labour market are a combination of challenges faced by all migrants, all refugees and all women (Beadle 2014). However, they have been omitted in most empirical studies, and little is known about their career development processes (Fleury 2016). This paper highlights the complexities that accompany women refugees as part of their career development.

Career development is a lifelong process of managing one's human capital through learning and work (SAQA 2013) that is affected by both personal and contextual factors (Gottfredson 1981; Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg 1986). This definition has been suggested as it acknowledges that there are various factors such as psychological, sociological, economic and educational factors that contribute to career development (Obiunu and Ebunu 2014). These factors can either enhance or impede the career development of refugees. Conspicuously, several barriers accompany the experience of forced migration, including language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of documentation (Abkhezr, McMahon, and Rossouw 2015; Kogan 2016). These factors are often greater than the barriers faced by local citizens and other migrant groups (Ortensi 2015).

Human capital development forms a core of career development (Dosunmu and Adeyemo 2018). The core focus of human capital development is on increasing skills with an emphasis on education and skills training (Singer 2012). The empirical literature indicates that often refugees do not find sustainable job opportunities because they possess low educational qualifications and in some cases their education and skills are not transferable in the host countries (Willot and Stevenson 2013). This paper defines

human capital as the knowledge and skills that people accumulate over time as they navigate their careers.

Refugee labour market integration is accompanied by contextual factors that exist at different spheres that include but are not limited to societal, organisation, and country levels (Kogan 2016). Their challenges stem from the disruption in schooling, education experiences and careers, and losing their families, amongst other factors that they encounter throughout the migration journey and when they arrive in the host country (Beadle 2014). They particularly face challenges of adjusting to a new social and cultural environment while simultaneously negotiating entry into the labour market (Bansel et al. 2016).

A pressing challenge that refugees encounter within the South African context is the challenge of applying for and obtaining refugee status (Amit 2012). This delays refugees' registration with professional councils and obtainment of employment. However, even after obtaining proper documentation, many employers are reluctant to accept the refugee documentation (Elez 2014) and often refugees are forced to engage in petty trading, casual labour and self-employment (Magqibelo et al. 2016). Refugee women also experience barriers specific to women such as childcare restraints and settling into traditional menial jobs associated with women (Allen, French, and Poteet 2016). The aspirations of refugees are affected by their environments (Beadle 2014), not forgetting gender-based socialisation, as cultural backgrounds influence their choice of careers (ILO 2015; Sandberg 2013). With the agenda of understanding the experiences of this vulnerable populace, this paper pays attention to women refugees.

Traditionally, the extant literature has portrayed a significant difference in the career development of males and females (Hiralal 2017). Women have not had the same access to opportunities for education and employment as men (Dosunmu and Adeyemo 2018). Refugee women in particular find it difficult to navigate career development due to the complexities of their multiple identities (Hiralal 2017). More so, most migration literature has been viewed through a male lens (Mbiyozo 2018). This study thus extends and adds the experiences of women refugees to migration and career development literature. Attending to narratives of women refugees responds to calls that have been made for career studies to focus on such distinct groups (Harry, Dodd, and Chinyamurindi 2017). Furthermore, career development trends have shifted towards postmodern approaches that accommodate the heterogeneity of the population (Abkhezr, McMahon, and Rossouw 2015).

Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the career development barriers affecting women refugees in South Africa. We acknowledge that refugees are composed of diverse groups; however, women refugees are considered to be an extremely vulnerable group due to their complex career development processes that are inextricably intertwined and rooted in various factors associated with being a migrant, a refugee, and

a woman. Amidst their vulnerabilities and challenges, it is essential to understand how they develop and navigate their careers in host countries. This study was therefore guided by the following question: How do the career development processes of women refugees in South Africa manifest, and what are the factors that influence such processes when they arrive in the host country?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a feminist approach to understand the career development process of women refugees. The study acknowledges that there are various theories and thoughts that fall within the field of feminism (Smith 2013). The agenda that underpins such theories includes a commitment to end all forms of inequality and oppression that emerge as a result of gender biases (Lubis et al. 2016).

The study adopts an intersectional feminist approach to understand how career development processes of women refugees manifest amidst their experiences as migrants, refugees and women. The underlying assumption is that the lived experiences of women cannot simply be explained as a gendered experience (Crenshaw 1991) as different forms of social dimensions all intersect to shape their experiences. The basis of intersectional feminism is to examine overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination that certain groups of women encounter on the basis of gender, race, and class. This theory helped to illuminate the multiple sources of refugee women's experiences as well as the impact of the interconnections on their career development. The study is also informed by the social cognitive career theory, which examines how self-efficacy, personal goals, and outcome expectations intersect with external variables such as environments that people find themselves in and nominal variables such as gender (Lent and Brown 1996).

Experiences of Refugees

Empirical literature presents refugee women as an economically and socially marginalised group (Ratkovic 2013). They are more likely than their male counterparts to be exposed to exploitation while trying to gain entry into the labour market, settle for menial jobs, and be lowly remunerated (Zetter and Ruaudel 2016).

Despite the South African Refugees Act granting refugees the right to work, the attainment of this right, especially for refugee women, is very challenging (Harry, Dodd, and Chinyamurindi 2019). Notably, all refugees encounter specific restrictions in their mobility in and access to the labour market (Long 2015); however, the impact of their individual characteristics, such as gender, heightens their challenges. Within the South African community, the country is still reputedly negotiating radical paradigms aimed at redressing past imbalances and increasing women's participation in the labour force (Chinyamurindi 2016). Specific to being a refugee, she has to endure the sequelae of all the experiences she went through that led to fleeing, the derailment in terms of her career, as well as the reluctance of employers to accept refugee papers (Bansel et al.

2016). With her status as a woman, she is bound to experience labour challenges specific to women (Zetter and Ruaudel 2016). Consequently, this makes successful entry into the labour market extremely hard (Olliff 2010). Refugee women grow up in “seemingly unending exile” (Evans, Lo Forte, and McAslan Fraser 2013, 14), living in a state of limbo—often with no access to education and opportunities to exercise their choice of livelihood; often it is impossible to think beyond meeting daily basic needs (Evans, Lo Forte, and McAslan Fraser 2013, 9). Compounding factors exist in South Africa, notably the unemployment rate that continues to increase. Recent unemployment statistics (StatsSA 2019) reveal that the unemployment rate is 29% nationwide and even higher in the Eastern Cape Province at 35.4%. In such a context, women refugees are competing for scarce resources with locals, which in most cases results in xenophobic attacks (Amtaika 2013; Tshishonga 2015).

Amidst the rising unemployment rates, the issue of scarce skills remains prominent in South Africa (Balwanz and Ngcawangu 2016). Despite this South Africa continues to look for crucial skills outside the country (Reddy et al. 2016). Notably, few attempts have been made to target the skills of immigrants (including refugees) already in the country (CoRMSA 2008). Singer (2012) postulates that local metropolitan areas should consider investing in the human capital of immigrants like refugees to build the capacity of their workforce. Arnold-Fernández and Pollock (2013) also opine that host countries can benefit from investing in the human capital development of migrants already in the country to improve economic growth.

By virtue of their migration status and gender, refugee women’s integration into a new country is complex (Evans, Lo Forte, and McAslan Fraser 2013). As they try to adjust to complex systems while recovering from trauma, their vocational paths are often hindered by the complex pathways of integrating back into education and training (Beadle 2014). Prior studies report that the pressing issues obstructing the career development of refugees include (1) language barriers, (2) lack of financial resources, (3) discrimination, (4) lack of educational qualifications and finally, (5) psychological capital (Nicolescu 2017; Tharmaseelan, Inkson, and Carr 2010; Willott and Stevenson 2013). The current study presents the voices of women refugees within the South African context.

Although there are studies that have focused on migrants (including refugees) within the South African context (Magqibelo et al. 2016; Perumal 2015; Rulashe 2017; Willie and Mfubu 2016), most of the research has focused on the refugees’ educational experiences and their inclusion in host countries, but very few studies have looked at how refugee women in particular navigate their careers. This study acknowledges the international growing body of literature on the career development of such distinct groups (Abkhezr, McMahon, and Rossouw 2015; Brane and Wang 2013; Nicolescu 2017; Tharmaseelan, Inkson, and Carr 2010; Willott and Stevenson 2013), but extends and highlights the experiences of women refugees in the South African context.

Research Design

Research Approach

The study followed an interpretivist philosophy hinging on a qualitative research approach to explore barriers that hinder the career development of women refugees in South Africa. This philosophy and approach helped promote the value of seeking knowledge and allowed participants to make sense and meaning of their subjective realities (Austin and Sutton 2014) using their own voices, activities, beliefs, and behaviour (Shaik 2016). The “three-dimensional narrative space” focusing on interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future) as well as situation was adopted whereby the researcher asked the participants questions about their past, present, and future while focusing on personal, social and environmental matters that might be shaping their identities and career choices (Clandinin 2007).

Research Method

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were employed in selecting research participants. This approach allowed the researchers to recruit the most appropriate sample in order to answer the research question (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). The researchers strategically approached refugee agencies in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape and asked for permission to access refugee women who take part in their activities. The rationale for approaching refugee centres in Port Elizabeth was motivated by logistical considerations. Port Elizabeth is a well-known ground for receiving refugees in the Eastern Cape Province. Before the restructuring of the Refugee Reception Offices, Port Elizabeth was the only city in the Eastern Cape with Refugee Reception Offices. A huge number of refugees in the Eastern Cape therefore conveniently stayed close to where they can easily access the services they require. Once contacts from the agencies were established, the researcher relied on referrals from these contacts.

Upon obtaining permission from the refugee agencies to approach and ask for research participants’ consent to take part in the study, a second phase followed. The refugee centre provided an office space that was reserved for the researchers for every Tuesday during the data collection process. The office provided was free from any disruptions. All members of staff were informed that if the door is closed they should not disturb as there will be an interview in progress. This ensured a smooth flow of the interview process and made the participants feel at ease, given the issues of privacy.

The sample used in the research consisted of 20 women refugees from African countries, notably, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (35%), Somalia (30%), Uganda (10%), Burundi (15%), Cameroon (5%) and Kenya (5%). Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Participants' profiles

<i>Pseudo-nym</i>	<i>Country of Origin</i>	<i>Pre-migration Career</i>	<i>Current Career</i>	<i>Further Studies in South Africa</i>	<i>Career Aspirations</i>
Anna	Somalia	Hawker	Hawker	None	None
Brenda	Somalia	Grade 12	Translator	Home-based care course	Home-based carer
Clara	Congo	Minor	Hawker	Engineering degree	Engineer
Deon	Somalia	Minor	Translator	Home-based care course	Air hostess
Edith	Somalia	Primary school	Spaza- shop owner	None	Business/ Hawking
Flora	Burundi	Grade 10	Home-based carer	Home-based care course; First aid; HIV counselling; Childcare	Lawyer
Gayle	Congo	Comedian; teaching qualification (incomplete)	Hairdresser	None	Teaching; Acting
Hilda	Cameroon	Bookkeeping diploma; Cashier	Hairdresser	None	Bookkeeper
Irene	Burundi	Grade 8 scholar	Hairdresser	Healthcare; Counselling; After care; HIV and TB counselling; Interpreting	Home-based carer
Jacqueline	Uganda	Secondary education diploma	Business owner/ Hawking	B Comm. Human Resources (Incomplete)	Teaching career
Karen	Congo	Law (3rd year)	Nanny; Translator	Home-based care; English course	Lawyer
Linda	Congo	Beauty therapy certification; Till operator	Vendor	None	Beauty therapy

Mary	Somalia	Minor	Researcher; Translator	Matric; Social work certificate	Lawyer
Nelly	Kenya	Grade 12	Vendor	None	None
Otilia	Burundi	Grade 6	Hairdresser	Till operator course	None
Prisca	Uganda	Pre-school owner/ Teacher	None	None	None
Queen	Congo	Teacher	Hairdresser	None	Teacher
Ruth	Somalia	Diploma in community development	Vendor; Spaza-shop owner	None	None
Sally	Congo	Professional tailor	Tailor; Self- employed	None	Tailor
Trish	Congo	Secretary	Hairdresser	English courses	Administrator

Data Collection Methods

Narrative interviews were used to allow the participants to share their experiences, migration journey, family background, vocational background as well as their career plans. The use of interviews “honours the lived experiences and knowledge of the people involved” (Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 89) and provided a holistic picture of the experiences of women refugees (Woodley and Lockard 2016). The narrative interviews created a setting that stimulated and elicited detailed stories and significant events in the participants’ lives (Brown 2012).

Data Analysis

The study utilised the narrative analysis technique to develop an in-depth perspective of refugee women’s experiences in relation to their career development and adaptation within the South African context. Narrative analysis emphasises the importance of meaning-making using an inductive and interpretive approach to coding (Toolis and Hammack 2015). Three levels of meaning-making adopted from Chinyamurindi (2012; 2016) and McCormack (2000) was utilised. First, a vignette of each interview was written; thereafter each vignette was developed into a longer narrative about each participant (Chinyamurindi 2012; 2016) Second, narrative themes were identified from the participants’ experiences and themes identified from each interview were compared across participants. At the final stage, an elaboration of the themes with the aid of the quotations and experiences shared by the participants is provided (Magqibelo et al. 2016; McCormack 2000).

Strategies to Ensure Data Quality and Reliable Reporting

To address concerns around reliability and validity, guidelines were followed to ensure data quality. First, an interview guide was designed and piloted with a sample of 10

migrants as a way of pre-testing the instrument. Second, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim within 24 hours. Moreover, pseudonyms were used to conceal the participants' identities and protect anonymity. Data collection was also stopped when data saturation was achieved, and no new information was extracted from the analysis. Finally, the study also established credibility by using the triangulation method (Kaminski 2004) whereby the researchers verified the factors that emerged to reduce subjectivity and optimise the validity of the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the institutional ethical requirements and standards. This was ensured by obtaining an ethical clearance from the participating institution and ensuring voluntary participation. All research participants provided informed consent. The study also preserved the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

Research Findings

Drawing from the data analysis, two main findings emerged. First, a range of barriers that relate to individual and contextual barriers were found to affect refugees post-settlement. Second, the interacting nature of these barriers is illustrated and shown to affect individual agency as refugee women focus on the acquisition of basic commodities rather than long-term human capital development. Table 2 and 3 present a summary of these findings.

Individual Factors Affecting Refugees Post-Settlement

Career Capital

Some participants believed that their lack of career capital affects their career development. This includes lack of education, vocational experience, knowledge, and skills needed in the open labour market. The most frequently narrated issue was language barriers. Due to language difficulties, participants often find it difficult to express themselves in English, let alone the local South African languages. This affects their entry into the labour market and as a result their career development is hindered. One participant (Otillia) narrated how language has impacted her vocational development in the following way:

When I arrived, I only knew basic English like greeting someone and I did not understand any of the local languages. I tried to look for work in salons, but I could not get anything because I could not communicate with the clients.

Moreover, lack of education and work experience has also seen women refugees work in menial jobs. Edith stated, "I never had the chance to continue with my studies when I arrived in South Africa. I had to look for work and fend for myself."

Most of the participants reported that they could not obtain employment as a result of their limited English proficiency and low level of formal education when they arrived

in South Africa. However, their English proficiency has improved over time, and some even obtained formal qualifications to gain entry into the labour force, but they continue to face formidable barriers in obtaining employment.

Psychological Capital

Having encountered so many challenges as women refugees, some participants spoke about how they felt reduced and discredited because they were refugees. Mary, for instance, narrated how she feels like a stateless individual in the only place she has known her entire life. She stated:

My refugee status has affected me big time. I practically grew up here in South Africa and my lifestyle became the South African lifestyle. I don't know anything about my home country, so when I get turned down because of refugee status I feel very helpless ... I can't get bursaries because of my refugee status ... I often ask myself why I am here, I am not accepted here and I am not accepted in my home country. Sometimes I feel like why am I even alive in this kind of situation.

However, most participants' narratives revealed remarkable resilience and resistance against the challenges and difficulties they have encountered as women refugees. Although they acknowledge that there are obstacles that hinder or affect their dreams, they remain focused on coping strategies and their development. One participant (Clara) narrated her story as follows:

I don't have parents to sponsor my studies and I cannot even apply for bursaries or funding so I have to work 10 times harder than my colleagues. I am basically my own adult, all expenses are on me, my rent, food transportation, my fees ... We come here with nothing and have to build something for ourselves but the system makes it hard for us ... but somehow I have managed to beat the system, I am doing well and I am happy with the progress that I am making in developing myself ... I think in all the countries refugees are very disadvantaged people. The local citizens forget that we did not come to their country because we wanted to, we came here because we fled persecution and various dangers from our countries ... When I look at us foreigners and I look at the local citizens, we are willing to walk even long distances searching for something until we find it. I remember when I was looking for the job, I walked door to door for three days in a row. I could not stop, I kept looking and walking. I did not even go to school for those three days. My determination was I have to find the job, I have to survive and that is what makes a difference from the locals is that we know why we are here and we know where we come from and that is something that makes us very unstoppable in achieving whatever we want and whatever we wish to have.

Some participants narrated how their career decisions are influenced by their need to empower other refugee women and future generations. Mary narrated her vocational choices as follows:

What influenced me to pursue my studies is that I want to be an Advocate. I don't want this young generation that is growing up to go through the same steps/ hardships that I

went through as they are growing up. I want to help the future generation and learn a little more about the law of this country and actually, how can I go further in assisting others.

As depicted above, the participants' narratives indicate that their personal state, in terms of hope, despair, and resilience for example, has an impact on their career development processes.

Contextual Factors Affecting Refugees Post-Settlement

Sociological Factors

The research participants identified a number of sociological factors that impact both their personal and vocational lives. These include xenophobic attacks, ethnic discrimination, application, renewal and recognition of refugee documentation as well as gender-related challenges. Most of the women narrated that discrimination is a major barrier in accessing the labour market. Mary expressed the following:

I think my refugee status is limiting me. I feel that it is the only reason I cannot go far. I don't want to believe that, but I think so. I am trying my best to develop my career, but I don't see any progress ... There was a vacant position and I was being considered for the post but when a new director was appointed and she consulted with other people only to learn that I am a refugee, they all reportedly said that I am just a refugee and the best position I can have is being an interpreter. I am however doing more responsibilities than that of an interpreter, my duties are similar to the Social Worker's duties, but I am not being given a salary that is equivalent to the work that I am doing.

It was noted that refugee women who are working also encounter discriminatory and xenophobic remarks from their colleagues. Flora described her experiences at her workplace and how her colleagues who are South African citizens treat her. She described her situation as follows:

The situation at my workplace is stressful, all I can say is that South Africans do not want us. This is one of my major challenges. From the very first time I started to work with them, they never liked me, they would tell me that there are a lot of South Africans who are suffering without jobs and I should go back to my home country and not steal employment from local citizens. They attack and call me all sort of names. At one time they reported to our superior that I had stolen money from our client, just to get me fired. Luckily I had good relations with that client and she testified that I would not have done such a thing and I was found innocent. I am just working because I need the job, but the place of work is very stressful, they do not want me here.

Clara revealed that her colleagues have already found jobs as well as a discriminatory experience that she encountered whilst looking for work:

Some of my classmates were already hired before we even finished our programme but because of my immigration status, my application is turned down in many cases ... In

one incident the employer was direct that they could not employ me because they need BEE points.

Ethnic racism and discrimination affect the career development of refugees. As narrated in the participants' stories, this is due to a number of factors. First, the local citizens see refugees as a threat to their economic security, because they are perceived to be stealing their jobs. Issues of equity and redressing past imbalances in South African citizens' economic privileges also affect their employability. The majority of the participants highlighted that employers do not have knowledge about their documentation and their right to work, thus they are reluctant to employ them. Mary, for example, narrated the ignorance of the employers and how they turned her down when she presented her refugee documentation:

People have this stigma at the back of their mind that once you present refugee documentation, it's a no for them. There was someone who wanted me to work as their secretary but when I produced my refugee documentation they said they wanted someone with a green identity document ... When it comes to documentation and working for international organisations, they require one to be a citizen of a county but I am not even a citizen of any county. So now I am stuck, there is nothing I can do.

Flora expressed that she felt the process of applying for and renewing her refugee documentation is time consuming, frustrating and affects her integration into the labour workforce. She explained,

every month or after every two months I have to travel to Durban to renew my refugee papers and this is costing me a lot of money. I can't believe how much I am using for these trips ... This is making my life miserable and very difficult. When I got my current job as a Home-Based Caregiver, I used to work a full month but now I am no longer working a full month because when I travel to Durban to renew my papers, they have to find another person to work in my absentia. This has resulted in me losing out on a lot of work when I am away and consequently my work days have been reduced to 15 days per month.

While all the participants encountered sociological factors affecting their career development, it appeared each participant had encountered experiences unique to themselves. Clara compared her situation and experience as a woman refugee with that of her male counterparts. She avers the following:

My situation would be different if I was a male, this world is a man's world. Male refugees often get a priority ahead of us females. They are perceived to be stronger than us women ... most of my male colleagues managed to get the jobs somehow because they are males ... so the fact that I am female and I am refugee it gives me a very bad disadvantage.

Some of the participants acknowledged that their careers are negatively affected by their socio-cultural backgrounds. Mary's narrative reflected how cultural background can be an obstacle to working in their preferred occupations. She states,

[b]eing a young Somali woman in the organisation was very difficult for me, first because of my age and also because of some cultural issues. Most Somali women believe that our place is in the kitchen. So working with service providers at this organisation, I failed to cope with the criticism that was coming from Somali elders (our clients) and eventually I stepped down.

Economic Factors

The participants' narratives revealed that economic factors are part of the motive they have in choosing a career path when they arrive in the host country. Although some of the participants have plans and goals to advance their careers, most of the participants narrated their need to at least acquire basic needs (food, shelter) as their key drive to engaging in any type of work in the labour market. Brenda states,

I studied a home-based care course, not because I liked the course, but rather it was the cheapest and quickest profession I could get a job in. The issue was to pay my bills and provide for the family.

It appears the participants are willing to take on any type of work that can give them some sort of remuneration. Short-term survival has become a priority as opposed to focusing on a long-term orientation to issues that affect them. The need to survive has limited participants' capacity to make independent choices when making vocational decisions. Hilda states,

It is not that I like hairdressing, I wanted to do nursing, or work as a Bookkeeper but I don't know where to go or who can help me. Hairdressing is the last thing I thought I would do. It is only that there is nothing else I can do here ... working at the salon is the easiest way for us to survive.

In essence, most participants are prioritising a short-term focus on survival at the expense of making vocational choices that encourage career and personal development. It is, however, important to note that this focus was due to structural constraints that limit not only their careers but their lived experiences.

Table 2: Individual factors affecting refugees post-settlement

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Illustrating Quotations</i>
Career capital	Education, vocational experience, knowledge, and skills needed in the open labour market	“When I first arrived in South Africa, I could only work in a restaurant, washing dishes and assisting with domestic chores because I did not have much education but now I completed a Home-Based Care course, but still I cannot find a proper job.” (Brenda) “The employers don’t give me the work because I don’t know the language and they can’t hire me because I don’t know any language from South Africa. I then tried to look for the foreigners working in salons and shops. That’s the way I am surviving.” (Gayle) “[L]anguage is a challenge for refugees especially us from Somalia and also adjusting to the way of life here in South Africa. So we as Somalians are more focused on careers where we have minimal or no progression whilst making a basic living to pay rent and buy food.” (Deon)
Psychological capital	Self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience to attain success	“What influenced me to pursue my studies is that I want to be an Advocate. I don’t want this young generation that is growing up to go through the same steps/ hardships that I went through as they are growing up. I want to help the future generation and learn a little more about the law of this country and actually, how can I go further in assisting others.” (Mary) “I thank God I can speak English. I know what is going on, I know the laws of South Africa. The way I help Somalians who don’t speak English, I assist them and the little that I am earning I feel happy because I am helping my people to get what they want in South Africa.” (Deon) “I received financial assistance from the refugee agency and I then started my own dressmaking business. They bought me a sewing machine and the relevant machinery and materials and I managed to start the business. I am very grateful for this opportunity. I could not have continued with my career if I had not received the assistance.” (Sally)

Although the women refugees encounter constraints that limit their vocational development, most refugees received social support which also works as a prominent factor in the construction of resilience, the attainment of their personal goals and development of their careers. The research findings suggest that social support plays a

vital role in the refugees' personal and vocational lives. Many of the participants reported that they received assistance from refugee agencies to further their studies, occupational training as well as self-reliance initiatives. It appears the refugee agencies play a vital role in shaping the vocational lives of refugees. The social support that the refugees receive is invaluable in creating meaningful progress in their careers and it offers them an opportunity to cope, navigate and adjust to the new environment. Edith explained how the refugee agency helped her:

I approached the Refugee Agency since I could not find a job and needed to put food on my table. The agency then put me under Self-Reliance programme to assist me with self-sustainability. They assisted me with goods towards my business and I have been vending since.

Social support has given these women refugees some form of solution to their everyday challenges and this assists in the attainment of their basic needs. Flora reported how she approached her church for assistance and how they help her to get work and people to care for. She highlighted the following:

My church knows that I am a Home-Based Care Giver and they assist me to get private clients who I can care for when they need me. I get a lot of opportunities through my church. Whenever they hear of someone who is looking for assistance, they call me. This has helped me a lot as I am able to get some money from doing this and this has also helped me to get experience.

The above-mentioned information was confirmed from the discussions with the service providers. The refugee service providers work in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. They work together to achieve successful integration of refugees into the host country by providing them with viable solutions to become self-reliant as well as enable meaningful participation of women refugees in the labour market. The refugee agencies assist refugees with all the challenges that they encounter, from logging their refugee applications, renewals of their documents, and the opening of bank accounts, to dealing with xenophobic remarks and educating the employers and the public about the rights of refugees.

Table 3: Contextual factors affecting refugees post-settlement

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Illustrating Quotations</i>
Sociological	Socio-economic status, peer groups, xenophobic attacks, ethnic discrimination, immigration status	“It is difficult to get a job here in South Africa because of our refugee identity documents. I am willing to do anything as long as it gives me money to buy basic commodities and pay rent.” (Jacqueline) “I used to have a shop, but I was robbed during the xenophobic attacks. I am now struggling to get a job or at least raise funds to open a shop again.” (Ruth) “There was a vacant position and I was being considered for the post but when a new director was appointed and she consulted with other people only to learn that I am a refugee, they all reportedly said that I am just a refugee and the best position I can have is being an interpreter.” (Mary) “They say a lot of things but that does not apply. They say we are supposed to work and study, but we face challenges and some employers to ask for a work permit instead ... Yes, it is written on our Identity document that we are supposed to work and study, but we can’t do that.” (Jacqueline)
Economic	Poverty, unemployment rates	“I would love to be a Nurse but firstly I cannot afford. So even if I want to educate myself, I can’t manage. These jobs we are working here are just to survive, to pay rent and eat. We can’t even apply for bursaries to further our studies.” (Irene) “I studied a home-based care course, not because I liked the course, but rather it was the cheapest and quickest profession I could get a job in. The issue was to pay my bills and provide for the family.” (Brenda) “It is very difficult to work here and sustain long-term career focus. As refugees, we have dreams we wish realised. The journey to those dreams in a foreign country is not always easy. So leading to those dreams, if ever they get realised, one must find ways in the present to earn an income and sustain themselves.” (Jacqueline)

The Role of Individual and Contextual Factors in the Career Development of Refugees Post-Settlement

As depicted by the factors above, it is important to realise that refugees' integration into the community and labour market does not happen in a vacuum. There is an interface between the individual and contextual factors. The career barriers expressed by the participants are not uniquely exclusive to each other but rather intersect to form obstacles that hinder their human capital development. These barriers cannot be addressed in isolation as their manifestation is complex and deeply intertwined in the various factors that intersect and impact refugees' experiences. It cannot be overemphasised that the barriers that the women refugees encounter are not mutually exclusive but are inextricably intertwined, shaping women refugees' career trajectories.

Discussion

The overall objective of the study was to explore career development processes of women refugees as well as to identify factors that influence such processes. The daunting challenges women refugees face emerge in critical and interlinked areas. A range of barriers that relate to individual and contextual factors was found to affect refugees post-settlement. These factors are inextricably intertwined and therefore create a unique experience for the refugee women.

The research findings, as in prior studies, identified the impact of pre-migration career competencies (language and education) on the career development of women refugees (Beadle 2014). First, language barriers were identified as a constraint to accessing the labour market. All the research participants were non-native English speakers and none of them understood the native languages in South Africa when they arrived and this proved to be a hindrance to the development of their careers. It is of importance to note that language barriers do not only affect employment accessibility but their overall lived experience as they will be unable to communicate with the locals, e.g. at hospitals. A lack of formal education also impacted their access to the labour market. Consequently, a combination of low language skills and poor or no qualifications forces refugees to take irregular jobs (Willott and Stevenson 2013). However, when the refugees eventually acquire training and skills to gain entry to the labour market, their career development process remains multifaceted as it is impacted by other factors that are beyond their control.

Comparable to other studies (Abkhezr, McMahon, and Rossouw 2015; Gordon 2015; Magqibelo et al. 2016), it was found that refugees compete for limited resources with the legitimate and preferred birthright masses. Their quest and struggles to obtain employment and develop their careers are exacerbated by already high unemployment rates in their place of refuge and locale (Gordon 2015) and thus accompanied by xenophobic attacks (Solomon and Kosaka 2013). The research findings revealed that women refugees are experiencing irrational discrimination in the labour market as a result of their country of origin and this hampers their career development. Specifically,

documentation application and renewal are identified as a major challenge among refugees (Amit 2012) and consequently, as alluded to in the narratives, this obstructs the careers of the refugees. Another challenge with regards to refugee documentation that emerged in the research findings is that employers are reluctant to hire someone using refugee identification. Prior studies (Gordon 2015; Harry, Dodd, and Chinyamurindi 2019) also reported that employers fail to accept applicants with refugee papers. In some cases, they are confused by refugee documentation and often they ask for a work permit (Solomon and Kosaka 2013).

With regard to issues exclusive to women, issues of gender stereotyping (ILO 2015; Sandberg 2013) emerged in participants' narratives. Gender stereotyping and unseen barriers, therefore, continue to affect women's career development processes irrespective of the qualifications that they possess.

The participants narrated that their main focus has shifted from long-term to short-term career advancement driven by the acquisition of basic needs for survival. This is a result of the various challenges that women refugees encounter and consequently how they resort to menial jobs that at least provide them with basic sustenance. Similarly, some research (Gordon 2015; Muchineripi, Chinyamurindi, and Chimucheka 2019) reported that refugees settle for low-skilled work to earn a living since they are unable to gain access to the formal economy (ILO 2015). Informal work is one of the few sources of income available to refugees (Rulashe 2017). This typically explains the participants' desire to acquire basic needs rather than being focused on the long haul in terms of a career path. Zetter and Ruadel (2016) reported that another reason why refugees end up taking irregular jobs is that they find it difficult to prove their educational and professional experience.

Although refugees' career development processes are shaped by challenges that they encounter, some participants narrated how they remain focused and determined to achieve their career goals. This is similar to what is postulated in the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) that one's personal goals provide the determination to engage in a certain activity in order to reach a particular outcome (Lent and Brown 1996). Some participants narrated their determination to assist and empower others and how this is shaping their career development process. The research findings in this regard align with the SCCT theory in terms of the interconnection between self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goal factors in the determination of career choices (Lent and Brown 1996).

It is evident that the career development processes of the participants are shaped by various factors that they encounter, stemming from pre-migration career capital (Tharmaseelan et al. 2010) as well as structural constraints within the environment. Of importance to note is that these factors are not mutually exclusive but concurrently intersect to form a barrier that influences the career development of this populace. The intersections of these factors magnify the constraints of the refugee women and limit

their opportunities to develop their careers. We commend the role that the refugee agencies are playing to support this populace. However, to address this complex intersectionality, there is a need for collaborative efforts from all relevant stakeholders, the communities as well as the government to work together and assist this populace.

Implications for Practice, Theory, and Research

Our study contributes to an understanding of the lived experiences and career development issues affecting women refugees within a South African context, bearing the calls for career studies to focus on diverse groups and situations in mind (Chinyamurindi 2016; Harry, Dodd, and Chinyamurindi 2017). This extends to refugee literature, which usually presents migration as a gender-neutral phenomenon (Fleury 2016) as well as to the body of career development literature.

Several career development studies conducted in South Africa utilised quantitative research approaches (Fourie et al. 2014; Riordan and Louw-Potgieter 2011). Narrative inquiry allowed the research to gain insight into the experiences of a populace that is usually invisible in most career studies, thereby showing careers as socially constructed rather than theorising reality (Maree 2015), as in quantitative studies.

Owing to their plight as refugees, their careers were disrupted, and most did not manage to complete or continue with their scholastic careers when they arrived in the host country. Moreover, this populace is overwhelmed by their lack of identity and lack of belonging and this creates despair amongst them, as they strive to make a career in the only place they have known most of their lives. Further, owing to the findings identified in the study, the career development processes of women refugees appear to be characterised by complexity in general. This positions the need for interventions to manage such complexity.

It is imperative that human rights lawyers educate and provide training to peace-builders, leaders within the community, organisations, human resources practitioners and the community at large about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, the challenges they encounter, and most importantly their right to education and work. Unless this is addressed, xenophobia and discrimination will remain prevalent, and employers will continue to turn down refugee applications because they don't recognise their documents. Investing in refugee human capital development initiatives that target critical skills areas could be key to improving the country's economic growth. This study calls for the community and relevant stakeholders to do more in assisting refugee women to thrive and grow while strengthening the economy and providing skills that are critical to the country.

We commend the work that the refugee centres are doing to enhance the human capital development of the women refugees, but contextual factors create an unequal pattern and social disadvantage that hinders women refugees' participation in the open labour

market. As noted above, unless all relevant stakeholders are educated about the rights of refugees, their integration into the host country will always be a challenge.

Limitations

Due to the interpretivist approach adopted in the study, the research purposely consists of a limited number of women refugees. This allowed the study to present rich data that can aid in creating interventions for this populace. The researchers are therefore aware that the sample is not representative of all the refugees in Port Elizabeth, let alone in South Africa. Although the focus was on exploring an under-researched phenomenon, the current limitations may be something that future researchers can bear in mind. Future research could include larger samples and incorporate a variety of methods to improve data representativity. Future research could also compare career development factors across geographical locations, diverse migration journeys as well as cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

While most participants presented inner strength and optimism to cope with their adversity as refugee women staying in South Africa, the challenges seem to overwhelm some of the refugee women and this ultimately obstructs their career development as well as their overall lived experiences. The arrival of women refugees in host countries entails risks due to lack of career capital, years of insecurity, and uncertain status as well as unemployment rates. Within this context, the well-being of women refugees' careers should not be taken for granted. Relevant stakeholders and governments should make an effort to create an enabling environment that supports this populace.

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