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Hopeful future perspectives of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands: a qualitative study

BACHELOR THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Refugees are more at risk for psychological problems. Around 41% of the Syrian refugees suffer from psychological problems, whereas among the Dutch population this rate is 15%. There are a lot of risk factors known, but there are not that many known protective factors for this particular group. A known protective factor for mental well-being in general is future perspectives, which has also been associated with resilience through traumatic events. Therefore, this study is exploring the following question: How do Syrian refugees in the Netherlands use hopeful future perspectives?

In total, 4 Syrian refugees above the age of 18 have volunteered to participate in this study. They were approached by either their contact person or the team leader from Vluchtelingenwerk. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method. The topic list consisted of events in the past in which they remained hopeful, role models and how they have coped and how they currently look at the future. The analysis of the interview was based on the holistic content analysis, with a general impression, including the impression about resilience and optimism and pessimism, and the themes that consisted of four components of hopefulness from Nunn, namely (1) mastery of the future, (2) purpose in life, (3) future support and leadership, (4) view of future self and trajectory.

The results suggest that having a purpose in life is most important in remaining hopeful, since all participants mentioned this. However, mothers seemed to be more concerned with the future of their children than their own. Additionally, it was discovered that people who are in the mourning process are not occupied with their future. The second component, "view of future self and trajectory" showed that the participants believed language proficiency was the first step to achieve their goals, but there was uncertainty about the following steps. Within the component of "mastery of the future", it seemed most important to cope with adversity and to take responsibility. For the last component, "future support and leadership" only the female participants mentioned that they remained hopeful due to their faith in a God. Lastly, it was hard to recognize the different types of resilience and it appeared that they differed per situation.

A limitation of this study is that there was a limited time span and only one researcher, which could have influenced the results, for instance due to the small number of participants. The possible implications of this study is that refugees are able to have hopeful future perspectives. Moreover, the components of Nunn seem applicable to this, with adding temporarily support and negative role models in the component "future support and leadership". So it appears that this study might be the first step in discovering a suitable protective factor for the psychological problems of refugees.

INTRODUCTION

Overcrowded boats, a young child who washes up dead on the shore. These images have become the face of the refugee crisis over the past few years, emphasizing the dangerous route asylum seekers have to take for safety and the need for the European countries to help. However, the problems for the asylum seekers do not stop after they have received shelter in one of these countries. Research has shown that almost 41% of the Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, asylum seekers who have received an asylum status, suffer from psychological problems, such as feeling blue, gloomy, and nervous (Dagevos, Huijnk, Maliepaard, & Miltenburg, 2018). This shows that refugees are more at risk for psychological problems than the Dutch population, where the percentage of people with psychological problems is only 15% (Dagevos et al., 2018). Dagevos (2018) stated that these psychological problems can have a negative effect on integration, which stresses the importance of examining what causes this and how countries can reduce these high numbers of psychological problems.

There have been various studies on possible risk- and protective factors of psychological well-being. The risk factors can be divided into (1) demographic factors, such as age and gender, (2) psychobiological factors, for instance personality, IQ, or a genetic vulnerability for certain psychological diseases, and (3) social factors, such as traumatic life events (Maas & Jansen, 2000). Moreover, a low socioeconomic status, loneliness and health problems are also seen as risk factors (Veenvliet, 2013). According to Ryff and Keyes (1995) the protective factors can be divided into six higher factors: (1) positive self-regard, (2) mastery of the environment, (3) quality relations with others, (4) continued growth and development, (5) capacity for self-determination and (6) purposeful living. Research has shown that the last protective factor "purposeful living" has more beneficial effect on the mental health than positive emotions when going through hard times (Frankl, 1985). Therefore, this could be an essential protective factor for refugees during the first years in their host country.

Since refugees experience different life events than most Dutch people, there are specific risk- and protective factors that apply to this group. The known risk factors for the mental health problems of refugees can be divided into pre-migration factors and post-migration factors, which can both be subdivided in different factors. Before migration, many of the refugees have been exposed to traumatic experiences, such as violence and torture. A study of Masmas (2008) in Denmark showed that from the 142 newly arrived refugees that were medically examined, 45% of them have been exposed to torture, such as being isolated or being "water boarded" (Masmas et al., 2008; Van Willigen, 2009). One study examined the effects of these traumatic experiences on the mental health of people who have been exposed to mass conflict.. They sent out surveys to adults that were from populations that had reported PTSD-prevalence and/or depression-prevalence (Steel et al., 2009). The results showed that exposure to potentially traumatic events account for higher rates of reported PTSD or depression (Steel et al., 2009). These results have been confirmed by other studies (Carswell,

Blackburn, & Barker, 2011; Bogic, Njoku, & Priebe, 2015). However, even though many studies report that traumatic experiences pre-migration influence the mental health, it is also mentioned that it is important to look at post-migration factors (Bogic et al., 2015).

The post-migration factors consist of the legal procedures (i.e. asylum procedure and family reunification) and the integration which asylum seekers/refugees go through after arrival in the host country. Research has shown that one of the most important risk factor in the asylum procedure is a long waiting time. A study among Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands over the time span of two years showed that there was an increase in psychological disorders among asylum seekers after time passed (Laban et al., 2004). Studies in other European countries about the effects of a long waiting time in the asylum procedure confirmed this to be a risk factor as well (Ryan, Benson, & Dooley, 2008; Silove et al., 2007). The reasons for this risk factor are related to the life in the asylum centres, where asylum seekers have to share rooms with strangers, are uncertain about procedures, and worried about their future and their family which they had to leave behind (De Jongh, Van Ee, & Dieleman, 2004; Bernardes et al., 2010).

After asylum seekers have received their asylum, they have to integrate in their host country. In this process, there are several risk factors that could negatively influence the mental health of the refugees. One study examined the post-migration factors in two groups: group 1 consisted of 143 Iraqi refugees who have been in the Netherlands less than 6 months and group 2 consisted of 151 Iraqi refugees who have been in the Netherlands for over two years. Both groups mentioned missing their family or worrying about family members, the lack of social contacts, worries about the financial situation, and not having a daily occupation (Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Van der Tweel, & De Jong, 2005). However, these factors have been mentioned more frequently by the second group than by the first group. Other studies have confirmed that these factors negatively influence the mental health, with research stating that the high unemployment levels among refugees and the high level of underemployment affect the mental health (Li, Liddell, & Nickerson, 2016; Van Willigen, 2009).

Besides these risk factors in the legal procedure and the integration, there are also protective factors during these stages that could beneficially influence the mental health of refugees. The first protective factor is having a short stay in the asylum centres and being able to work (Pharos, 2016). In the Netherlands, asylum seekers can apply for a work permit after their asylum application has been processed for six months (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-b). However, research has shown that after 2.5 years after receiving the asylum status, only 11% of the refugees have a job (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS], 2018). This is partly due to the fact that refugees have three years to integrate in the Netherlands and most of them use that time period to do so, which could mean that they may not speak the language sufficiently enough to work (CBS, 2018). Moreover, the waiting period for the asylum application has increased over time, with asylum seekers having to wait up till 1 year and 4 months before their application is looked at (Telegraaf, 2019). If this continues, the waiting period will go up to two years within the next few months. This means that, even though work and a short

stay in the asylum centres are protective factors, the mental health of refugees will not benefit from these in the near future.

Furthermore, obtaining an asylum status and having a security of residence would be beneficial to mental health , since this leads to less insecurity (Pharos, 2016). Currently, refugees receive an asylum status for a temporary permit of five years (Immigratie-en Naturalisatie Dienst [IND], n.d.). After these five years, they can apply for a permanent asylum permit. However, the Dutch government wants to shorten this time to a temporary time period of three years (Vreemdelingenwet 2000, 2018). After these three years, they can extend your temporary permit by two years, but the government will consider the asylum status before granting this. Only after these five years, people can apply for a permanent permit. If these plans will be executed, this would mean that there will be more insecurity of residence for refugees due to the second testing of the asylum permit and therefore it will take more time before this can function as a protective factor.

Another protective factor is having social support present during the asylum procedure and later on (Ryan 2008; Pharos, 2016; Laban et al., 2005). Research has shown that by the use of a smartphone, asylum seekers and refugees are able to keep in touch with family at home via social media, WhatsApp and video calling, which already positively influences mental health (Pharos, 2016). However, the actual presence of the family members is most beneficial since refugees do not have to worry about the safety of their family members in the country of origin. Due to the long waiting period for the asylum procedure, it takes a long time for refugees to start the process of family reunification since this can only be done after being granted an asylum status. Additionally, the waiting period for family reunification becomes longer as well (Kamerman, 2018). Thus, the social support is essential for refugees, but it takes a long period of time before refugees are reunited with their family members that were left behind in the country of origin.

In summary, research has identified a lot of risk factors that could have a negative impact on the mental health of refugees. On the contrast, the list of protective factors for the mental health of refugees is slimmer. Moreover, most protective factors will be absent for the majority of the refugees due to the policy of the Dutch government. Since this is not something that is in the control of the refugees or something that will likely change within the next few years, it is essential to look at other known protective factors for mental health that could be beneficial to refugees as well. As mentioned before, "purposeful living" can be more beneficial on the mental health than positive emotions if someone is going through a hard time (Frankl, 1985). Frankl (1985), one of the survivors of the Holocaust, wrote that he believed that keeping hope about the future was one of the things that make people able to survive traumatic experiences. Sools and Mooren (2012) have made the argument that it is possible that due to uncertainty, something which refugees experience as stated above, people might need to feel more certainty. According to them, a possible way to feel more certain is by imagining the future (Sools & Mooren, 2012). Additionally, research has shown that the hope that people get from thinking about their future perspectives results in people to strive and improve their

lives to achieve the image that they have about the future (Feldman & Snyder, 2005). Moreover, a more recent study showed that psychological well-being is partly determined by the ability to achieve goals about the future (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008). This stresses the importance to explore if and how refugees look at the future and how it might have helped them to remain hopeful through the difficulties they experienced.

A study in the psychiatric field already stressed the importance of personal hopefulness and perceived future on the mental well-being of patients (Nunn, 1996). Nunn (1996) examined possible components that could be related to hopefulness and concluded that there are five components that could lead to this. First of all, some people need mastery of the future. This entails that people want to feel some level of control over the future and ability to contribute to positive outcomes. In order to feel like this, people have to feel (1) personal agency, (2) personal adequacy, (3) environmental malleability and (4) illness responsiveness (Nunn, 1996). However, there can be variation in the need for level of perceived control. A second component is the purpose in life, which has been hypothesized to be one of the components that can also sustain hope (Nunn, 1996; Frankl, 1985). The third component is future support and leadership. This component entails that people remain hopeful because they have trust in others. Future support is the believe and the desire for a significant other in the future. This can be more important than having a significant other in the present. Leadership can refer to the perceived adequacy and reliability of a leader that can help them (Nunn, 1996). The fourth component is view of future self and trajectory. This component is related to the view of the future self and the trajectory needed to follow in order to get there. For this component, it is important that people have a high level of self-esteem, mostly to the self in the future. Research has shown that a low self-esteem could result in helplessness since people attribute negative situations as internal and stable (Nunn, 1996). The last component is optimism and pessimism. People who have an optimistic view tend to see struggles as temporary and they attribute defeat to external causes. However, pessimistic people tend to do the opposite, causing them to feel helpless (Nunn, 1996). So, this study stated that these five components lead to hopefulness in psychiatric patients, which beneficially affects their mental health. However, it is uncertain whether these components would also be essential to hopefulness among refugees.

As can be seen in the last component of personal hopelessness, the perception of the duration of obstacles can have an influence in hopefulness and this in turn could influence the needs of people. An important aspect in this is the resilience of the refugees. Resilience is the adaptive power to bounce back after a challenge (Kent, Davis, & Reich, 2014). It consists of three types: sustainability, recovery and growth (Zautra, 2009). These types all relate to different ways of experiencing setbacks (Schuhmann & Van Der Geugten, 2017). Firstly, sustainability is associated with the experience of a chronic situation of struggling and suffering. Secondly, recovery is related to a single setback that people experience. Lastly, growth is associated with the idea that struggling will result in more positive experiences later on. The difference with sustainability is that people with growth normally

change their goals based on the struggle since they have learned from that which allowed them to grow (Schuhmann & Van Der Geugten, 2017). Thus, it could be expected that the perception of the traumatic events and the personality of refugees could lead to individual differences in how they imagine the future (Nunn, 1996; Schuhmann & Van Der Geugten, 2017).

In conclusion, it appears that hopefulness about the future leads to beneficial effects on the mental health while going through hard times (Frankl, 1985). Nunn (1996) has identified five components that contribute to hopefulness in the psychiatric field. Though, it is still unknown if these components are also applicable to refugees. Since refugees that ask for asylum in the Netherlands are from different countries, likely causing different cultural- and social perceptions of the future, this study will focus on refugees from a specific country. Because the majority of the refugees are from Syria, and Dagevos (2018) showed that the prevalence rates of psychological problems was relatively high for Syrian people, this study focuses on Syrian refugees (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2018). It will explore the following research question: How do Syrian refugees in the Netherlands use hopeful future perspectives?

METHODS

Participants

In total, four Syrian refugees volunteered to participate in this study. Two of these participants were females and two of these participants were males. The mean age of this group was 33.5 years (SD 12.3) with a range from 18 to 49 years old. Two of the participants were Muslim, two of the participants were Christian and none had another religious belief. Exclusion criteria of this study were being under the age of 18 years old or having diagnosed psychological disorders. They were personally invited to join this study by the researcher, the team leader or by their personal contact person of Vluchtelingenwerk. All participants received information in the Syrian Arabic language in which the aim of the interview was explained. Moreover, they were told that they could withdraw from the study at any moment in time. All participants signed the informed consent (Appendix A). The BMS ethics committee approved the study (request number 190133).

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, using a topic list. This structure was chosen to ensure that the same topics were covered in the different interviews. This would also allow the interviewer some space to adapt to the answers given by the participants and ask for more detailed information if necessary (Hijmans & Kuyper, 2007). Moreover, by using a topic list the scheme could be changed after an interview if it was discovered that certain topics were more important than initially thought.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the presence of a Syrian translator, so participants would be able to speak in their own language.

The topic list covered situations in the past as well as in the present (Appendix B). Participants were asked about a specific situation in the past in which they remembered that they were struggling with the insecurity of the situation, but still managed to remain hopeful about the future. Furthermore, they were also asked about experiences of other people or role models in which they remembered that the person had coped with the insecurity of the situation by remaining hopeful about the future. Moreover, they were asked where they see themselves in a couple of years and how they think they will get to that point. Lastly, they were asked if there are already some aspects about that future present in the current situation.

Procedure

As mentioned before, participants were personally invited by the researcher, the team leader or their personal contact person of Vluchtelingenwerk to participate in this study. Vluchtelingenwerk is an independent organization in the Netherlands that stands up for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. The team leader is an employee of Vluchtelingenwerk who is responsible for the social team or the legal team working at a location. The personal contact person is one of the members of the legal- or the social team working on matters for clients in that domain.

After expressing the willingness to participate, an appointment was scheduled to conduct the interview. The interviews were conducted in a private room at the office of Vluchtelingenwerk, with the interviewer and the Syrian translator present. It was chosen to use a translator for the interviews, since most of the Syrian refugees do not speak sufficient Dutch. A research among Chinese elderly showed that language barriers result in a need for a translator for people who do not (fully) speak the language (Seeleman, 2002). Moreover, the translator is a refugee from Syrian descent as well which made it easier for him to understand certain cultural aspects resulting in fewer mistakes as a consequence of cultural differences between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kloos, 2002). In the case of the interviews with the female participants a family member, such as a son or a husband, was present as well. In order to enhance the safe environment, both the translator and the interviewer are employees at Vluchtelingenwerk and were therefore familiar and trusted faces to the interviewees.

Before the interview started, participants received further information about the interviews in the Syrian Arabic language. It was explained to the participants that the aim of the study was to see how they have coped with situations by looking at the future. Moreover, they were told that these interviews do not have any influence on current and/or future procedures at the IND. It was explained that the interviews were audio recorded in order for the interviewer to transcribe these later on, but that their identity would remain anonymous for people outside of this room. They were told that they could withdraw from the study at any moment if they would wish to do so. Lastly, it was mentioned to

the participants that if they would get serious doubts or worries after these interviews, there would be volunteers specialized in psychological problems that could assist them with this.

After the informative part of the interview was over, participants were asked several demographic questions. These questions consisted of their age, gender and their religion. Hereafter, the actual interview started. The participants were interviewed based on the topic-list described above. The interviewer had to give specific examples. If a participant did not have examples based on their own experience, more focus was put on specific examples from people in their surroundings or role models.

The amount of examples determined the duration of these interviews. If refugees could not think of anymore situations they would like to share, the interviews were ended. The duration of the recordings varied from 43:11 minutes to 1 hour and 09:25 minutes. The duration of the entire interviews including the informed consent varied from approximately 55 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed based on the audio recordings into a Word document. All information that was related to the identity of the participants, such as names, dates and locations were deleted from the transcription. An employee at Vluchtelingenwerk from Syrian descent listened to one of the audio recordings with the transcribed interview next to it and checked if there were any errors in the translation. It became clear that the text of the original translator and the second translator matched in overall terms. However, the original translator did sometimes add some minor words or sentences in order to ensure that the interviewer understood the cultural context. For instance, the original translator added the word "Islamic" to explain to the interviewer that one of the participants feared his life in Syria as a Christian, due to the presence of certain (Islamic) groups. Since these additives are minor and only make the story more understandable, instead of altering the content of the words of the interviewee, it was assumed that the original translator translated the interview correctly. By checking for these errors, the validity of the translations of the original translator was increased (Sperber, 2004). This minimized the disadvantages of using a translator, therefore making it a beneficial solution for the language barrier and the cultural differences between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kloos, 2002; Seeleman, 2002).

The interviews were analysed based on the two parts of the holistic content analysis, the general impression and the themes (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, Zilber, 1998). This analysis was chosen since this would ensure that the personal story of each participant would remain intact. The general impression of the participants consisted of three components: (1) a short summary of the background story of the participant, (2) an impression of the person, for instance based on how the participant talked or entered the room during the interview, and (3) the impression the researcher got of the participant based on the interview, for instance the resilience of the participant. The themes

consisted of main-codes and several sub-codes. The holistic content analysis normally uses an inductive analysis method to determine the themes (Lieblich et al., 1998). This means that based on possible themes that are found in the interviews, general rules are made. However, for this study a deductive analysis method was utilized, examining how the different participant used the components of hopefulness of Nunn (1996) to remain hopeful. Therefore, the components of hopefulness of Nunn (1996) functioned as the initial main codes. This method would make it clearer whether the same components of hopefulness were important for each of the participants or whether there were differences between the importance of the components for the four participants.

The researcher coded each interview after it was conducted and after all of the interviews were conducted, a first version of the final coding scheme was made. All of the interviews were re-coded based on this first version of the coding scheme. Throughout the finalizing of the coding scheme, there were five problems. The first problem was that not all the names of the components and criteria mentioned by Nunn (1996) were suitable for this study. For example, the name "illness responsiveness" was not as applicable to the current study since the participants do not necessarily have to cope with illnesses. Therefore, this sub-code was renamed into "responsiveness to adversity" to be more suitable. Secondly, there were some doubts about the suitability of all the components and criteria. The main code "optimism and pessimism" may be unsuitable since this was usually more an impression than a construct that could be coded. For that reason, this main code was removed and used in the general impression. A third problem was that there was an overlap between some of the main codes. Hence, a clear division had to be made about the definition of for instance the two main codes "purpose in life" and "view of self and trajectory". Fourthly, certain main codes needed to be expended. For instance, the definition of "future support and leadership" given by Nunn (1996) did not cover temporary support. Lastly, with certain sub-codes there was some uncertainty whether they overlapped with sub-codes of other main codes and thus should be combined together or kept apart. For instance, there was uncertainty whether there should be a separate sub-code of "self-esteem" as part of the main code "view of future self and trajectory", since Nunn (1996) mentioned self-esteem with this component, or whether this would fall under the sub-code "personal competence" of the main code "mastery of the future".

Since there is only one researcher, the supervisor looked over the interviews and first version final coding scheme together with the researcher and problems, such as the ones previously mentioned, were discussed. This was done in order to ensure that the codes were clear and if certain codes were redundant or if codes needed to be added. Based on this conversation, agreements were made about the doubts of the researcher and questions that the supervisor had about the coding scheme. After the discussion, intersubjectivity between the supervisor and the researcher was achieved and the final coding scheme was finished. All the interviews were coded once again based on this scheme.

After the coding scheme was finalized, the quotes from the transcribed interviews that were used for the report were translated from Dutch to English. Hereby, there was another chance of errors in the translation. Therefore, the quotes that were used were back-translated by a student to diminish the chances of errors (Sperber, 2004). This student is a native Dutch speaker who is currently following a study at an university in the English language. This student was chosen to ensure sufficient knowledge of both languages.

RESULTS

In the four interviews that were conducted, it became clear that the first four components of hopefulness of Nunn (1996) were accurate main codes to describe how people have remained hopeful about the future during hard times. All these main codes consisted of several sub-codes. Table 1 includes an overview of the frequency of the different main- and sub-codes mentioned per participant. These main- and sub-codes are organized per frequency with the codes mentioned most often on the top and the codes mentioned least frequent on the bottom.

Table 1

Overview of the frequency of the main- and sub-codes per participant

Main code	Sub-code	Yassin (N=23)	Nadir (N=42)	Jamila (N=26)	Laila (N=25)	Total (N=116)
Purpose in life (*N=56*)	Work / study	6	9	2	7	24
	Humanity	4	4	7	1	16
	Children	0	0	4	6	10
	Independency	0	5	1	0	6
View of self and trajectory (*N=35*)	Language	5	5	4	4	18
	Uncertainty	3	2	3	1	9
	Integrating	0	7	0	1	8
Mastery of future (*N=16*)	Personal competence	0	5	0	0	5
	Personal agency	1	2	0	2	5
	Responsiveness to adversity	1	2	0	1	4
	Environmental malleability	2	0	0	0	2

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Future support and leadership (N=9)	Religious leader	0	0	2	2	4
	Reunification with loved ones	1	0	2	0	3
	Temporary support	0	0	1	0	1
	Negative "role models"	0	1	0	0	1

The first main code, "purpose in life", entails that people have goals and ambitions in their life and these ensure that people remain hopeful during hard times. All the participants mentioned this main code numerous times which resulted in this main code to be the largest of the four main codes (N=56). This code could be recognized by for instance the use of the words "dream", "aim", or "goal". Moreover, the purposes in life were usually answered by the question "Where do you see yourself in an X amount of years?". The second main code "view of self and trajectory" is about the image that people have about their future and how they will get there. It is possible that people either have a very clear image of what their future will look like or there can still be some doubt about what the future will look. This is the second largest group (N=35) and was also mentioned by all the participants. The main code could be found by asking the question "How will you achieve your goals?". This is also the division between this main code and the main code of "purpose in life". The former is about steps that have to be taken to be able to achieve the goals mentioned in the latter, whereas the latter are goals in itself or are described by the participant as goals in itself. For instance, work/study is a step that needs to be taken in order to become independent. However, participants mentioned studying and/or working as an aim itself. One participant said that *"my dream when I was in Syria was that I would go to Europe because of the high level of education for my children"*. Consequently, this falls under the main code "purpose in life". The third main code "mastery of the future" (N=16) is related to the perceived level of control people want to have over their future and the ability to ensure positive outcomes. This main code is mentioned by all the participants, except for one participant. This code could be recognized by the use of the words "confidence in myself" or by participants talking about being assertive. One of the participants said that *"I know what I want and thus I am gonna prepare at home concerning the language"*. Furthermore, some of the criteria were related to reactions to adversity and thus if a participant talked about the way of coping with this, this could be an indication of this code. For instance, when one of the participants said *"yes, my father is dead. I don't have another choice. I have to do this."*. Lastly, the main code "future support and leadership" (N=9) was mentioned the least often and mostly by the last two participants. The code entails that people remain hopeful because they have faith in the support of others. It is not necessary that this support is already present, sometimes just the prospect of having this support in the future is more important than having this support in the present time. This support can come from loved ones

or leaders, but also from "strangers" who can offer temporary support since they are present in a hard time and may experience a similar thing, such as other refugees. Besides this positive influence, the leadership could also be in negative role models showing them how they did not want to end up. The main code could be identified by words such as "reunited" in relation to loved ones. Moreover, it could easily be identified when somebody would tell about "God" or "Allah" when for example they were asked what helped them to remain hopeful.

Underneath, the story of the four participants is told based on the impression of the participant during the interview and the four main codes and several sub-codes. All the participants get a random Arabic name, in order to make their story more personal. These are not their real names.

Yassin

The first participant is an 18-year old Christian-orthodox man, Yassin. He had to flee Syria because *"what for me was actually very difficult, was that I was in the age of the military service. I was afraid that I was enlisted in the army and I did not want to do that. I am still young, I want to life. I want to study, I am moving on. Not fighting with Syrian people. That would have happened, but I do not believe in that. That is why I wanted to leave Syria."*. He fled Syria along with his older brother and parents to have a more humane life. However, on the journey to Europe, his family experienced an extremely traumatic event: *"the second time was the toughest, because the boat was broken. I was with my father, brother and mother. Then my father died, yeah… The hardest part was when my father died. I cannot talk about that."*

Yassin came across as a sweet, but slightly shy young man. He politely introduced himself to me, but he seemed hesitant to have a proper conversation with the interviewer. A possible reason is the language barrier between the interviewer and him, but his attitude seemed a bit nervous and unease. After the translator entered the room, Yassin became more comfortable and his attitude was more open. Yassin knows the translator very well, which could explain why he was more comfortable in his presence. Throughout the interview, Yassin appeared as a smart person. It was noticeable that he already spoke and understood some Dutch, even though he had only recently started with his integration courses. Moreover, Yassin seems to be an optimistic and resilient person by the way he coped with his father's death. He said *"my father has died in the sea. This was sad, but for me an extra motivation. My father is already dead. I am going to Europe, and I am gonna do something. It really gave me a push, a sort of challenge. I am not going back to Syria, I know that I do not have a future there. Greece is nothing. Turkey is nothing. I am going to Europe. It was said, but because of it I got a challenge like "I am gonna do something. And that remains in my head"*. He mentioned that one of the reasons he is so focused on the future is because by looking forward he is able to leave his past behind.

Purpose in life

Yassin had three things in mind that kept giving him hope during his journey from Syria to the Netherlands: *"There were actually three things. I am a Christian and I life in X. This is a Muslim city and near IS and other Islamic parties. It is dangerous if I stay there as a Christian. For me, in Europe there is… in Europe everybody is Christian and everybody goes to church. So for me it was clear that I wanted to live there. Second that was very important to me was that I would feel as a human there, not an animal. And the third is that I can study well there. Everybody for the war knew that if you wanted to do something well in your study that you needed to go to Europe. Go back to Syria and you have a degree from France or the Netherlands or Germany, you are more valuable. You have a doctor's degree or something… I don't know exactly. But everyone knows that the education in Europe is better than in our country.".* The first two things fall under the sub-code of humanity, since they allow Yassin to live a more humane life in the Netherlands as he will be treated as a human being. Due to the religious freedom he is able to go to church and be open about his religion without fearing for his safety. The last thing falls under the sub-code work/study. Yassin said that *"my dream is to become a doctor… a dentist. Yeah.. When I was in Syria I was in university, informatics. My dream was to become an engineer in informatics. That did not work, because I went here. Now I am in the Netherlands, I see how good it is here and I am grateful to the Netherlands. The Netherlands has done and given me a lot. I want to give something back by studying hard, working and helping. I have experienced a lot of hard things in Syria and on the route to the Netherlands. So when I see somebody who needs help, I want to help."*

View of self and trajectory

Yassin has an image of the first step that he has to take in order to go to university and become a dentist, namely learning the language. According to him, *"the language is a sort of barrier. It is a very hard and important step to continue. It is a starting point.".* However, it is not as clear to him which steps have to be taken after learning the language. He mentioned: *"That is not clear actually, how it will go.. I am taking it step by step. I first have to learn the language. If that does not work, I cannot do anything. After that I would like to study, after learning the Dutch language. For me the dream is to become a dentist. But I will see how it will go for me. Maybe I will not get good grades. But I am open in doing something else. But my idea remains to study. If I am going to study later, I have to learn the language. That is my first step. I cannot think about how it will go after that, because I do not know how much time I am gonna need to learn Dutch.".*

Mastery of the future

As mentioned above, Yassin acknowledges that he first needs to learn the Dutch language before he can continue pursuing his goals. At the moment, Yassin already speaks some Dutch even though his

Dutch lessons have only recently started. This is since Yassin has already tried to learn Dutch by himself. *"It starts with Google Translate. My goal was to learn the language. When I was in the asylum centre, I always tried to build sentences in Arabic and then translate them with Google Translate. And I practiced that with Dutch people there. I asked them to correct me if I did something wrong. Dutch people who worked there, with COA or Vluchtelingenwerk or something else, have helped me a lot. I could talk Dutch with them and they would correct me. That is actually the first step of me and people have helped me. This started in the asylum centre.*
I have also met a Syrian young man who is already in the Netherlands for four years. His parents lived in the asylum centre because he had applied for family reunification. He came by often and I have also met him. I said that I wanted to practice Dutch with him often. That is also why I have learned so much.". In this way he seems to be taken his own responsibility and is not passively waiting for the time his integration starts. Moreover, Yassin is able to cope with adversity. After the death of his father, he did not throw in the towel but he kept going because he felt like he had to do it. His death gave him a certain push, an extra motivation as can be read in the quote in the impression. Additionally, as a result of the three purposes that Yassin had in mind, he was able to cope with all the different things that happened on the journey so he appears to be able to handle his environment. He said that *"these three ideas are a sort of angel. They helped my during the route with all the problems, with all the sad things that have happened.".*

Future support and leadership

For Yassin personally, this main code was not important. He did not mention that reunification with loved ones, a religious leader or a negative "role model" helped him to remain hopeful. He did however mention that he met several people on his journey for whom reunification with family in Europe was an important aspect in remaining hopeful.

Nadir

The second participants is a 26-year old man, Nadir, who is a Muslim. Nadir had served three years of his military service in Syria before he fled. *"My idea was clear. My goal was that I wanted to leave Syria. I did not want to stay there anymore. I was in the army for three years. I was fighting against other Syrian people, that is not normal. Three years is too long, also too long for a young man. I did not want to do it anymore. During these three years I only say my parents once. 48 hours I had some free time.".* He did not receive permission of the military to leave, so on the drive to his home he feared his life. *"I decided to leave. I had to go from X to Y. My parents live in Y. So I was nearly on the road for six hours, but I did not have permission from my chief there. So I was afraid that any moment… that I had to leave the car and show my residence permit or identification card. That was a very hard moment that I might get caught, because I did not have permission. They would have asked*

me why I left, how that was possible, we are in war. How could I do that? But fortunately I did not get anything, but it was a difficult time. It already started in Syria. For me it was… a sort of: I can go to Y, calm… Or I am gonna die. That could already happen on the road. There are several groups, if another group knows that I am a soldier at the regime. Then those people will kill me. If the other group so… I also get something from the other group, so every group has a different idea. That could have cost me my body.".

Nadir came across as a person who knows what he wants and is very focused on his future. He mostly talked about his future during the interview. Therefore, the structure that was used in the other interviews was not used in this particular interview. In between, the interviewer had to steer the conversation in the direction of the past to also get more information about this aspect. Furthermore, Nadir seems to have confidence in himself and to easily contribute adversity to external factors. For instance, after he realized that in Turkey he could barely earn enough to pay food and rent, he attributed these conditions within Turkey. He said that *"yes, when I went to Turkey it was more about the idea that I would make more money. But after Turkey there is Europe. It can always get better than in Syria, because people are respected and I get eight hours of work. If I work extra, I get paid."* Thus Nadir appears to see adversity as a single setback and is able to cope with these.

Purpose in life

Nadir had a very clear purpose in his mind: he wanted to work. This was the reason why he initially left for Turkey. *"My idea was that I did not want to stay in Syria any longer because of the war. After this I have heard that people can work in Turkey, earn money there. So this was my idea. I am first gonna leave Syria and after this I am gonna work there. I can earn money, because in Syria the economic situation was almost broken. Nobody could actually earn money. So I left to work there."* However, he noticed that in Turkey people were not respected as employees. This was the reason why he decided to go to Europe, since he had heard that employees in Europe were treated with respect. *"Yes, that was a whole… Actually, it was a big surprise. I could not earn money there and I had to work a minimum of 11 hours. I get too little money, if I work, I get money. If I don't work, I don't get money. And uhm… Not just working, making hours, but you also have to be protected. If you work 11 hours, but you do not have the target you need to… Let's say you have to make 10 bottles of water and you do not have that, you get less money. It was a sort of slave… And to be able to live a normal life everybody in the family has to work. Just to be able to eat, drink, yes… For me that was a shock, like 'what is this'. I thought it would be different. And then I thought Turkey was not the right place. I have heard that in Europe everybody only works eight hours and people respect your work and you as a person. From that moment I thought it would be better if I would go to Europe. I was not insured in Turkey as well. I did not have permission to work so I had to work illegally, like some people do here. So I did not have insurance. So if you have a problem… I had an accident here [points at hand], and I*

did not have health insurance…" So for Nadir, it was important that he would be treated with respect, as an employee and as a human.

Nadir eventually wants to work in the Netherlands: *"Yes. Now I cannot work yet, but I want to be a driver. Not for a bus, but a truck driver."* By having a job, Nadir can become independent of social benefits. *"I want to stop with the social benefits and become independent. I had a conversation with my contact person. I want to be out of the social benefits as soon as possible. I promised that."* This is important to him, since *"I want to show everyone that I am not here to receive social benefits or money from the government. No, I can earn my own money. I want to be independent."* Though it is not enough for him to only be independent of the Dutch government. *"Yes, first I am gonna work for somebody. After that I am gonna save money to be independent. So not just from social benefits, but also from the employer. So I am gonna build my own company."*

View of self and trajectory

Nadir mentioned that there are a few things that he has to do. *"First, the language. Without the language we cannot do anything. Second thing is contact with people. Also if I can speak the language properly and I have contacts, I can ask the specialists how I can do it. What kind of education, what kind of paper, documents. With whom do I have to ask to achieve my goal? That is clear to me. I want to learn more Dutch people, because they know it better than others. They live here, they are Dutch and they know or they are familiar with the right way to take to achieve my goals. That is always between contacts, with contacts. And I am also gonna ask specialists. They have already done it and they know how that can be arranged before I will start my own company later."* Moreover, contact with Dutch people can help him with his integration into society. *"Yes, I am a social person. I am used to having social contact with people. They come to me, drink coffee; I go to them, drink coffee. Also contact. I want to learn their traditions and culture as well. If I stay home, I cannot learn their traditions and culture. With… via contacts I can learn more about who you are as Dutch people".* So Nadir has clear goals in mind and he already has some ideas about how he can achieve them. Nonetheless, he said: *"my aim is clear, but how can I… I know the big picture, the language… But I cannot do it alone, I need your help."*

Mastery of the future

As mentioned in the impression, Nadir seems to be someone with a high level of confidence. He is certain that he will be able to achieve the goals that he has in mind. He bases this on the previous experience by leaving Syria to go to Turkey and afterwards leaving Turkey to go to Europe. *"Yes, I talk about dreams. That is my dream. But when I was in Syria, my dream was that I want to leave Syria. I did that. And then when I was in Turkey, I wanted to work and earn money. I did that. And after I saw what there was in Turkey, my dream was to leave Turkey. I did that as well. Now my dream is, I can always dream… Then I am gonna do that."* He sees this as goals he had in mind at the

time and that he was able to achieve this. He said that *"I know what I want. I am gonna achieve that. I am"*. This motivation and drive remains there, despite certain setbacks. He keeps looking at other possibilities when faced with these, such as in the quote in the impression about the working conditions in Turkey. He also takes responsibility in achieving his goals, for instance learning the language. *"I have a friend, or I asked him, because I had to request my travel document. I did not know if my Dutch was good enough, but that friend did not have time for me. But I know what I was gonna request so I prepared it at home myself and I built all the sentences properly and I did the appointment at the municipality by myself. No translator."* Now, he continues to do it this way: *"I did that one time and now it stays in my head. So next appointment I am gonna do the same thing. I know what I want so I am gonna prepare it at home concerning the language. The language is very important, but now I do it by myself."*

Future support and leadership

Nadir did not mention that reunification with family members or religious leaders were important to him. However, he did mention the role of negative "role models". *"I do not have a large network here. I only have a friend who currently studies. But for him it is more like 'I am here, it is okay'. He does not have, for the future, he studies now and he does what they… Yes… I do not have an idea about other people. My brother is not interested to have a future here. I am only going with people who want to build a future here. If I have the feeling that people do not do that or if it is too hard, then I do not want to hang out with them."*

Jamila

The third participant is a 49-year old female who is Christian orthodox. Initially, only her two sons were supposed to leave Syria to escape the military service. *"Actually it was the idea that my sons would go alone. Ensure that they do not stay in Syria because they are in the ages that they can be enlisted in the military service to fight against other people. I was afraid, I did not want my children to travel alone. So we decided to do it together."* The journey was harder than she had expected it to be: *"we did not think it would be really hard during the journey. For me, it was super difficult. I never thought that I had to travel so long, walk… Between the mountains and the sea. I was also scared at the borders because it was easy for someone to take your money. After this the thing happened in the sea, with my husband… That was too much, it is not easy to accept that. Also to cope with that. For me this was super difficult. I can't… Yes… You cannot imagine. It is still a sort of video."* The husband of Jamila drowned during the journey.

Jamila came to the interview along with one of her sons. Jamila came across as a woman that is strong, grateful and caring. After the death of her husband she still seemed to be looking at the silver lining: *"on the other hand, I also got a new life…"* Moreover, during the interview, she asked

about the interviewer's personal life and motivation and she gave the impression that she was interested to know more about this. She was the only participant who showed this interest. However, Jamila still seems to be mourning the loss of her husband: *"Up till now, that remains. I am in the Netherlands now, but for me it always remains close what happened there. I still have hope that my husband maybe did… I want my husband to still be alive. Maybe it was an accident and he did not die. That is why I want to get into contact with the Red Cross. I want to know what happened to him. I hope that he is still alive and not passed away. Till now…"* So Jamila seems to be someone who would normally be able to see the silver lining in adversity, but for whom the death of her husband is too much to cope with by herself at this moment.

Purpose in life

When Jamila left Syria, she wanted to have a safe and stable life in Europe for herself and her family. *"We were happy as a family. We went away together as a family. In Europe, we would live in a safe country. Plus, we could at least have a stable situation, a stable life. The hope was that we would in a safe country, a stable country. As Christian it was no longer safe in Syria. Europe was safe for us, it was better. Nobody would talk about religion so we are good. We will get a stable situation."* She hoped that in Europe it would be how it used to be in Syria before the war. *"Yes, before the war I was allowed as a woman, a Christian woman to go without a headscarf. But during the war this was not easy. And where I lived with my children and my husband were many extreme Islamic people. They wondered how a woman could go without a headscarf or with a short T-shirt. Here it started actually… Then we couldn't stay there anymore."* She said she has found this freedom in the Netherlands: *"Freedom. And yes… Freedom. I am allowed to say everything, dress how I want. In church, I am no longer afraid. In Syria I was afraid in church, it could be bombarded. But here in the Netherlands, I can do everything, it is freedom."* This freedom falls under the sub-code "humanity", since she can express her religious belief without fearing for her life.

Another purpose in life for Jamila is the future of her children. *"And for me, my future is the future of my children. Thy will study… I want them to be able to follow a good study and to have a good job and… Get to their future. That is important to me."* She wants her two sons to study and to work so that they no longer need to receive social benefits from the Dutch government. *"I want my children to work in the future and do not receive social benefits anymore, then they can live independently. That is very important."* She believes that her sons have to take this seriously *"and as their mother I have to take care of that, not 'I am sick, I do not want to go to school today'. No, they have to go to school every day and they have to take their study seriously. If they do that, they will get a job"*.

View of self and trajectory

Since Jamila does not have a personal purpose in life, she does not have a clear trajectory to take towards that aim. However, her answer to the question how she will get to the purposes is: *"for me it is first learning the language. That is clear. It is not a large goal, but I have to learn the language"*. The rest of her future is uncertain, since *"what would happen in the future was not in my mind at that time. Not at all…"*

Mastery of the future

Jamila did not mention anything that could fall under this main code. A possible explanation is that she is not occupied with her future at the moment.

Future support and leadership

For Jamila, her religious faith and her trust in God has helped her through the difficult times on the journey and helped her to continue. *"Yes… For me that was really… My faith in God, in Jesus. That gave me all the strength. I am continuing, for my children. My faith has… I will believe in Him and I know that he will always do what is good for me and the children."*

Next to her faith in God, she still remains hopeful that at one point in time, she will be reunited with her husband. As mentioned in the quote in the impression, she still remains hopeful that her husband did not pass away but is still alive somewhere.

Moreover, Jamila had very good contact with other refugees on the journey: *"I have very good contact with people… I have been with them during the entire journey. Also during the part in the sea, I was with other people"*. She experienced temporarily support of them when her husband died: *"And I have good friendships with other people, they took care of me. They know what happened. Everybody is gone now, one went to Sweden, and the other went to Denmark or other countries… But it was more that we could talk in a friendly manner… I have lost my husband, but they were with me. Not just people from Syria, but also from Iraq… But it was more like… Yes, we were together, they were with me…"*

Laila

The last participant is a 41-year old Muslim female. Her husband and oldest son left Syria, because they realized that there was no longer a future there. *"We made the decision together. Why? We thought about leaving Syria every year. But every time we thought: 'maybe it will go better in Syria, we will stay.' Until… it was not easy. Until someone outside of his house to buy for instance bread, it was not sure if he would come back. That was very dangerous. So we decided together that we would leave Syria, but because we did not have enough money… It costs a lot of money… So we decided that my husband and one of our children would go to the Netherlands and then request family*

reunification. That was for him… Yes, we took a big risk. Because of the story of Syria, Turkey, and Greece… And here. And I was in Syria and I had no idea where my husband was now.” In that time, Laila was left behind in Syria with the rest of her children. She had no way of getting into contact with her husband and son so she did not know where they were. *“My husband left Syria with our son to go to Greece, but they could not go to the Netherlands together. So my husband went to the Netherlands alone and he left our son in Turkey… Contact person at Vluchtelingenwerk has tried for a long time to get him to the Netherlands….” “… Our son was a minor, 16 years old…”* Ultimately, Laila and her children were reunited with her husband through family reunification. Their oldest son joined them as well.

Laila came to the interview along with her husband. Laila came across as a loving and warm woman and mother. She immediately showed the interviewer pictures of her children on the phone and videos of her poetry readings. Furthermore, she thought about the questions that were asked which gave the impression that she is a smart woman. Laila seems to be a person who takes responsibility for her decisions and remains optimistic in hard situations. For instance, she said *“we have decided to leave… Yes… that was huge responsibility and a great risk. So we have to accept the consequences and uhm… I believe in Allah so I know He will help us. And the result is gone, he is with us again”*. Because of this optimism she is able to cope with adversity.

Purpose in life

Laila used to be a poet in Syria and she hopes to become one in the Netherlands as well: *“I have experience as a writer. I received an award. I used to be a poet. So I have experience and my ambition is to perhaps make a book in the future as a writer or poet.”* This award was supposed to be given to her in Australia, *“but I was absent because I was in Syria and I could not go to Australia.”*

Another purpose for Laila is the future of her children. *“My dream was that when I was and Syria, that I went to Europe because I wanted the high level of education for my children. The Netherlands is going to support my children, yes… Better than in Syria. My goals were for my children.”* This is the most important thing for her: *“they have the support and money now to go to a higher level. That is most important. But I do not know what will happen exactly. That is why… But I expect that my children will find their place…”*

View of self and trajectory

In order to become a poet, *“the first step is to learn the language at a high level. And practice the language. After that I can maybe make the book, my plan…”* However, she does not know what to do after learning the language. *“Without the language… The Dutch language I cannot do anything. So I have to learn the language well and after that I can do the next step. But I do not know what the next step is.”*

Mastery of the future

As mentioned in the impression, Laila appears as a strong woman who takes responsibility for her actions. This becomes clearer in the quote that is also mentioned in the impression. Her son shares this characteristic of his mother, since he turned this adversity into an advantage and he used his time in Turkey to learn more about another culture.

Future support and leadership

In the period that her son was alone in Turkey, Laila trusted that Allah would look after her son. *"It was clear… That Allah would take care of our kid. And we accept everything that comes from Him, positive or negative. I have made a decision and I continue. I will go to the end. Positive or negative. We will accept that. So was it nice, was it good? Yes, I thank Him plus Vluchtelingenwerk for what they have done for me and our son in Greece."*

DISCUSSION

Main findings

The aim of this study was to explore how Syrian refugees in the Netherlands use hopeful future perspectives. In order to explore this, four semi-structured interviews about were conducted to discover how these people remained hopeful during adversity. These interviews were coded based on the components of Nunn (1996). The results suggest that refugees use four out of the five components of Nunn (1996) to remain hopeful. Firstly, the component "purpose in life" seems to be the most important component in remaining hopeful for this group. All of the participants seemed to have purposes in life for themselves and/or their children. The largest purpose was to have a job or be able to study. Frankl (1985) already emphasized the importance of having purposes to help cope with adversity and to remain hopeful. He quoted Nietzsche in his book who said that *"he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how"*. However, it was noticeable that the mothers' future was more focused on their children than on their own future. This could be explained by a study among Syrian refugees that looked at the reasons for fleeing. The study showed that the most frequently mentioned reason for parents to flee Syria was for the future of their children, especially for women (Dagevos et al., 2018). Thus, for Syrian parents, the children and their future are highly important. However, it is uncertain whether this leads parents to only focus on the future of the children since there were differences between the two participants who were mothers. For Laila, the future of her children was more important, but she still had an image of her own future. On the other hand, Jamila was not occupied with her own future, but this could be explained by the loss of her husband, for whom she is still mourning. This is in line with a study that showed that a possible symptom of complicated mourning is aimlessness, or the sense of uselessness about the future (De Keijser, 2004). Moreover, Sools & Mooren (2012) argued that depressive feelings can result in a blockage of the future or the

feeling of an empty and meaningless future. So it appears that people who are still mourning and consequently experience depressive feelings, have more difficulty imagining their future.

Secondly, for the component "view of future self and trajectory", it was found that all the participants mentioned that the language is the first step to achieve the goals. This may have been essential to this particular group, since all of the participants wanted to have a job and/or their children to have one. Research has shown that if refugees want to have a successful chance on the job market, language proficiency is an essential aspect (Mattheijer, 2000). However, the participants mentioned that after the language it was uncertain how they could achieve their goals.

Thirdly, within the component of "mastery of the future" it seemed that responsiveness to adversity and personal agency were mentioned by three of the participants. Personal agency could possibly be a manner to cope with the insecurity refugees are faced with (Pharos, 2016). Though, it is possible that this is particular to this group, since they appeared to be very assertive. Moreover, they appeared to be resilient and to look at the silver lining, which could explain why they in general responded to adversity well. However, it was noticeable that Jamila did not mention this component once. An explanation for this is that she is not occupied with her future and therefore does not need to have control over it.

Lastly, the component of "future support and leadership" was also applicable to this group. The female participants both mentioned that the faith in a God helped them to remain hopeful. A possible explanation for this is that Syrian women seems to identify more with their religion and are more involved than Syrian men (Dagevos et al., 2018). The study showed that women think their religion is more important and they think about their religion more often than men do. However, another explanation could be that the younger generation does not identify with religion as much as the older generation since the female participants are older than the male participants. Though, the study of Dagevos (2018) did not state that there was a difference in identification and religious involvement between young and old. Moreover, it was discovered that the definition of Nunn (1996) could be expended to also include the influence of temporarily support of people who may be experiencing a similar thing and to add the influence of a negative "role model" that can give you extra support to pursue the opposite of the situation of the "role model".

Besides the usefulness of these four components of Nunn (1996), it was shown that this group had a high level of resilience to cope with adversity. It is possible that this is particular to this group, since all of them seemed to be optimistic people. However, it was difficult to detect the different types of resilience that people had overall. Especially the difference between sustainability and growth was hard to detect in these interviews, since it was unknown whether or not the goals changed after adversity. Moreover, it appeared that resilience changed per situation. For instance, Jamila gave the impression that she would normally cope with adversity by looking at the positive aspects, but the death of her husband may have resulted her to currently experience this adversity as something chronic. Therefore, it may be harder to identify the overall type of resilient in one interview.

Strengths and limitations

Based on the design of this study, there are several strengths and limitations. The first strength is that participants were able to speak in their native language since a translator was present. Since most of the participants do not (fully) speak Dutch or barely speak Dutch, it was easier for the participants to talk about their personal stories in their native language. Moreover, the translator and the interviewer are both employees of Vluchtelingenwerk so they were familiar faces to the participants. This likely made the atmosphere for the participants safer and consequently participants must have been more comfortable discussing intimate details about their own life. Another strength was that the interviews were semi-structured which meant that the participants had room for their own input. This gave the researcher a better impression of the participants since it showed the topics they were more comfortable discussing. For example, Jamila barely focused on the future and instead preferred to talk more about the past. By using this structure, Jamila was able to still share her story which gave a better insight into the thoughts and feelings of her than a structured interview would have done. A last strength was that the division of religion, age and gender was relatively equal. These could all be factors that could have influenced how the participants remained hopeful. By ensuring that the division is relatively equal, the researcher is more able to detect if these factors result in differences in the aspects of hopefulness.

On the contrast, the research also had some limitations. The first limitation is that there were only four participants. This means that the results should be interpreted with caution since it is unknown whether the same results would occur with a larger number of participants or whether the results are only applicable to this specific group. An example is the need for language: this group was highly occupied with their purposes in life and therefore needed to learn the language. For refugees who may not be as occupied with this, the need for language proficiency could be lower. Moreover, it is possible that there could have been a selection bias. Participants were approached by employees of Vluchtelingenwerk, but it is possible that only those clients were approached of whom it was known that they would be willing to participate. This could have led to a selection of participants who are more concerned with their future than the overall population of refugees. Therefore, it is possible that the results mostly resemble how people with a high motivation to work towards a certain future remain hopeful, instead of how refugees in general remain hopeful. Besides these limitations, the interviews seemed to be too short and covering a too limited timespan to make conclusions about the type of resilience the participants used in general, especially since the resilience appear to change occasionally. Another limitation is that participants could have given socially desirable answers, since the interviewer worked at Vluchtelingenwerk or the presence of family members. In order to ensure that the participants were most central in the interview with family members present, the questions were directed towards them. If the family member added their experience, this was seen as the story

of a possible role model. For instance, the husband of the last participant added how he was able to remain hopeful during the difficult times. Minor comments of the family members were used to supplement the story of the participants. These minor comments were usually comments related to factual statements about events that occurred in Syria or on the journey to Europe. However, it cannot be ruled out that the participants felt less open to speak about their experience and gave more socially desirable answers due to the presence of family members or the employees of Vluchtelingenwerk. Lastly, there were various translations in the process, namely the translation during the interview and the translation from Dutch to English for the quotes. Even though measurements have been made to minimize the chance of error as a result of translation, it cannot be excluded that there have been some errors.

Implications for practice and recommendations for further research

It is recommended that this study will be replicated with a larger sample size before any strong implications are made. Though, this current study does suggest that refugees are able to remain hopeful future perspectives. Therefore, letting refugees set goals and purposes in life might be an effective manner to help them cope with adversity (Frankl, 1985). Guidance could start focusing on this from an early stage, especially since uncertainty has been argued to lead to more need for certainty which can possible be achieved by this (Sools & Mooren, 2012). However, it has to be taken into consideration that refugees may not be able to focus on the future as long as they are still struggling with trauma or loss that they have experienced in the past. Consequently, it may be necessary to first focus on the process of mourning and/or on treatment in more severe cases. Afterwards, the focus can be put on working towards a future.

Even though refugees appear to be able to have purposes in life, they seem to have more difficulty to determine how they can achieve these goals. Consequently, refugees may need more guidance in breaking down their goal(s) in clear and realizable smaller steps. This makes it easier for people to make progress with these goals (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). This is essential since achieving goals has a beneficial effect on the mental well-being (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008).

Furthermore, a possible implication is that language appears to be important if people want to pursue certain purposes in the Netherlands, such as having a job or study. The government only makes it obligated to learn the language after having an asylum status (Rijksoverheid, n.d.-a). Though, the new policy has broadened the possibilities to learn languages in the asylum centre (Dagevos et al., 2018). Currently, around half of the Syrian refugees in the asylum centre actually make use of these possibilities or try to learn Dutch themselves (Dagevos et al., 2018). This means that half of the Syrian refugees are not learning the language until their integration program, even though they are spending a long period of time in asylum centres (Telegraaf, 2019; CBS, 2018). This may be

problematic since research has shown that refugees need to have a certain level of language proficiency in order to have a job in the Netherlands (Mattheijer, 2000). This problem is also shown by the fact that only 11% of the refugees have a job 2.5 years after receiving their asylum status (CBS, 2018). Since having a job is a protective factor, it may be necessary to focus more on stimulating refugees to already start with learning the language as soon as possible (Pharos, 2016).

A last implication is that the components of Nunn (1996) are applicable to refugees. However, the component of optimism and pessimism is hard to identify and is mostly based on the general impression of people. Additionally, the component "future support and leadership" should be broaden to also include temporarily support and the support of negative "role models". The temporarily support can consist of people who you meet during a difficult time and give support, possibly because they are experiencing similar adversity at the moment. It is not necessary that you will have a long lasting relationship with these people. Negative "role models" can be people who can provide refugees extra motivation to ensure that they will not end up as the "role model" has done.

A recommendation for further research is to examine if other groups of refugees use hopeful future perspectives in similar ways or that there are differences between refugees of other nationalities, since this study only focused on Syrian refugees. Therefore, it is suggested that further research will not only be conducted on this particular group. Additionally, the current study could not examine the different types of resilience in relation to hopefulness due to a limited time span. However, it appears that people might have a different type of resilience depending on the situation. Consequently, it might be relevant to explore if resilience can indeed differ per situation and if the different types of resilience influence how people remain hopeful. Moreover, this study explored how Syrian used future perspectives to remain hopeful during adversity. Previous research has shown that future perspectives can help people to cope with adversity and that this has a positive effect on the mental health (Frankl, 1985). However, it is advisable to examine the actual effects of future perspectives on the mental health of refugees in further research to test if this would be a suitable protective factor in reducing the mental health problems among this group.

Conclusion

The current study proved that Syrian refugees are able to have hopeful future perspectives. The four components (1) purpose in life, (2) view of future self and trajectory, (3) mastery of the future and (4) future support and leadership of Nunn (1996) lead to the hopefulness in this group. This shows the applicability of these components outside of the psychiatric field. Though, the component of "future support and leadership" should be expanded with temporary support of people and negative "role models". The temporarily support can be people whom you may not have a long lasting or deeper relationship. The negative "role model" can be anyone who motivates a person to pursue a different path than the role model has done. Due to a limited time span and one researcher which led to for

instance a small sample size, the results should be interpreted with caution and the study has to be replicated before any strong conclusions and implications can be drawn. But this study could be the first step in discovering a suitable protective factor to reduce psychological problems among refugees.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent for research

'l hereby declare that I have been informed in a manner which is clear to me about the nature and method of the research. I understand that what I say during these interviews will not have any influence on current and/or future procedures at the IND. I have been informed that the interview is being recorded. I reserve the right to withdraw this consent without the need to give any reason and I am aware that I may withdraw from the experiment at any time. If my research results are to be used in scientific publications or made public in any other manner, then they will be made completely anonymous. My personal data will not be disclosed to third parties without my express permission.
If I request further information about the research, now or in the future, I may contact Tara Ditzel (tditzel@vluchtelingenwerk.nl) or Samir Khalaf (skhalaf@vluchtelingenwerk.nl).
If I notice after the interviews that I am becoming worried about my future in such a way that it is obstructing me, I know that I can go to Vluchtelingenwerk and that they have volunteers here who I can talk to about these concerns.'

Signed:

Name subject:..   Signature:..

I have provided explanatory notes about the research. I declare myself willing to answer to the best of my ability any questions which may still arise about the research.

Name researcher:... Signature: …………………………………………..

1. **Past situations; hereby participants are asked about a specific past situation in which they had difficulties with their situation and what prospect made them continue**
   Example questions:
   a. Do you still remember a specific situation in which you had difficulties with the things you had to cope with since you came to the Netherlands?
   b. How did you cope with this? What prospect kept you going?
   c. How was it to think about the future in that situation?

2. **Role models; hereby the participants are asked if they have role models or if they remember any particular situation of family members/friends in which they admired the way they kept going**
   Example questions:
   a. Is there anybody in particular that you look up to because of what he/she has achieved since coming to the Netherlands? How does this make you feel?
   b. Do you remember a particular situation of somebody else in which they had a lot of difficulties coping, but they kept going because they worked towards a specific goal in the future? How does it feel when you think about that?

3. **Current way of looking at the future; hereby participants are asked how they look at the future now and what it does to them**
   Example questions:
   a. Where do you see yourself in five years?
   b. How does it make you feel that you do/do not have a clear picture of your future?
   c. What makes that you have not considered the future?
   d. Do you think it would help you to have a future perspective in mind?
   e. What would you need if you wanted to have a clear picture of the future perspective?