

Everyone who joins in the establishment of a new school [of life for children] participates in an act of joyful hope and faith. A new school [of life for children] looks to a better world, for it exists to help students develop the character, intellect and mental resilience that will enable them to prosper in circumstances that we can only imagine. If it becomes a great school [of life for children], it will educate its students not merely to be personally successful but also to use their gifts to build their communities and enhance the common good to levels beyond our dreams. In dedicating this school then, we dedicate the governing board, teaching and administrative staff and students to the most devoted and creative service . . . to mankind. (His Highness the Aga Khan; as cited in Aga Khan Development Network, 2008, ¶ 7)

**University of Alberta**

Understanding the Experiences of Ismaili Afghan Refugee Children  
through Photo Conversations

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

Children are rarely asked about their experiences in the aftermath of war. Each child if given an opportunity has a unique and precious story to share. It is most likely that embedded within their experiential stories are essences of resilience. The purpose of this study was (1) to understand the phenomenon of resilience in an exploratory way with regard to how Afghan refugee children adapt despite facing adversities in the aftermath of war, and (2) to contribute to the knowledge of nursing science and practice for healthy childhood development. The core research question was: *What are the experiences of Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada in the aftermath of war?* The sub question was: *How do Afghan refugee children describe their experiences of day-to-day life?*

Gadamer's (1960/1989) *hermeneutic* philosophy was used to understand the experiences of Afghan children in the aftermath of war. In addition, *hermeneutic photography*, which is based on the methodology of hermeneutic (interpretive) inquiry, was used as the methodological approach as well as method. Data were collected with the aid of photographs of the children's own choice. Two to three *photo conversations* were done with seven children residing in Edmonton, Alberta. The participants ranged between the ages of 13 to 17; five were females and two were males. They were all born in Afghanistan and had two parent families and belonged to the Shia sect of Islam specifically, the Shia Imami

Ismaili Muslims. *Gadamer's* approach to data analysis was adopted throughout the study.

Four themes emerged that described the day-to-day life experiences of the Afghan refugee children: (a) cherishing the family; (b) treasuring the Afghan culture; (c) creating opportune spaces to dwell; and (d) building and sustaining resilience. Recommendations were drawn as a useful guide from the findings of this study for education, practice, policy development, and future research to benefit Afghan refugee children and their families to dwell in a new country.

## Prologue

This research study was envisaged from my personal and professional experience. Since childhood I have had to face several adversities of poverty and learn to keep afloat in order to continue living. Furthermore, I could not pursue the professional career of my choice as my parents could not afford to pay for the expenses. Therefore, I chose nursing as a profession because it provided the finances for the necessary training and skills to care for different kinds of clients. Over the years I found a niche for myself in nursing and therefore continued to pursue higher education in the same profession.

My nursing career gave me lots of opportunities to work internationally. One of my experiences was working as an instructor in Karachi, Pakistan in the School of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences at the Aga Khan University (AKU), which is an academic centre of Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). AKDN is comprised of a group of development agencies, institutions, and programs primarily working in the developing parts of Asia and Africa, encouraging creating lifelong improvement in the lives of the poor by simultaneously addressing the social, economic and cultural issues leading to self-reliance (<http://www.aku.edu/university/aboutus/akdn.shtml>). For more information of the work of AKDN please refer to the above site.

In 2000 while working at Aga Khan University in the School of Nursing (AKU-SON), I took a group of second year diploma nursing students for their clinical practicum to a refugee camp in Karachi, Pakistan known as the *Transit*

*Center.* One of the objectives for the diploma nursing students was to assess the child and family holistically including their health and well-being. This transit center was operated by Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) Pakistan, an affiliated institution of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in collaboration with the Ismaili Community and in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support Afghan refugees.

The Afghan refugees in this transit center were registered on arrival, and a health history and assessment of the family were documented. A health unit was built within this transit center to ensure the health and well-being of the Afghans. Moreover, all of the Afghan refugee children received appropriate immunizations and three meals were provided daily. Several volunteers organized a variety of activities, such as teaching basic communication skills, importance of cleanliness, integration into the Pakistani culture, and how to apply for jobs. As soon as a family was equipped with the skills and ready to move into the community, a group of volunteers facilitated the move to ensure a smooth transition. I found this camp very different from the description of other refugee camps in Pakistan. This experience in the transit center in Karachi, Pakistan initially sparked my interest in the impact of war on the well-being of Afghan refugee children. However, none of the children in this study lived in the transit centers but enthusiastically talked about going to Pakistan and receiving assistance from the Ismaili community.

War has an impact on every aspect of a child's life (Machel, 2001). It is difficult to identify the actual course of events because of simultaneous adversities of war, such as the destruction of infrastructure, loss of opportunity for education, and an increased morbidity and mortality of the population. The first priority at times of crisis is saving one's life. I learnt a lot about the Afghan refugees by accompanying the nursing students for their learning experience to the transit center. The Afghan families informed me that to save their lives, they have had to impoverish themselves by selling all of their belongings to provide cash for transportation and survival while trying to flee from their homeland. Cash in hand supposedly enabled Afghan families to buy safety to survive as refugees in neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan. The children had no choice but to leave Afghanistan with their family for safety. I observed children playing with each other and having fun. Questions I had were: (a) what are the experiences of Afghan children when fleeing or hiding with their families to be safe during conflicts? (b) how were the children adapting in the refuge or transitional country of Pakistan? and, (c) what choices existed for these children in the country of refuge? A yearning was created within me to learn from the children themselves by listening to their experiences of living.

My next assignment at AKU-SON was working in Kabul, Afghanistan following the post-Taliban period in 2002 for a full academic year and in the summer of 2003. At this time I was already a full time graduate student at the University of Alberta (U of A) in Canada. Therefore, I chose to become a long



distance part-time student and worked full time in Afghanistan. Due to my experience of working in the transit center, as mentioned above, with the Afghan children and their families in Karachi, Pakistan I could relate to their experiences of loss.

The infrastructure destruction due to over two decades of war in Afghanistan included schools, hospitals, homes, and markets. In the midst of devastation I observed some children playing and having fun by the water pump, located near my residence, waiting their turn to carry the water for their family. I was moved to see these children resilient and doing well in spite of all the adversities of war. My childhood experience of facing adversity was nothing compared to these Afghan children. I wanted to learn from these children about how they faced the adversities of war. However, due to security reasons, I was not able to do research in Afghanistan. Therefore, I chose to study Afghan children currently living in Canada.

### **Challenges to Implementing the Research Process**

In this section I provide an account of the challenges that I experienced during the Ethics approval process at the University of Alberta (U of A). Following my Candidacy examination, I applied for ethical clearance to the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) Panel B at the University of Alberta. Subsequently my supervisor and I were requested to attend the HREB meeting to explain the process of the research study. The committee members were concerned that the probing questions coming out of resilience literature that I had

planned to ask regarding the children's experiences during the war would create stress for them. So we (my supervisor and I) agreed not to use those questions at any time during the conversation. Since I was using *photographs* of their own choice to ask them to tell me their stories and/or discuss whatever was important to them, I agreed not to use those questions. Consequently I got a letter from the HREB that the committee members felt that an external opinion should be sought regarding the possibility of this proposed study as a potential risk for re-traumatizing the participants. My proposal was then sent to one of the agencies that had agreed to assist me to recruit research participants. The way the study unfolded from proposal defense to actual data gathering then shifted more. I was requested to make some changes to the purposeful sampling criteria. I had planned to recruit English-speaking Afghan refugee children and so it did not matter whether they came to Canada through Iran or Pakistan. I was informed by HREB that I should recruit research participants that came to Canada through Pakistan and not both Iran and Pakistan as they came from a different background. I lived in Pakistan for almost a decade and know the country's national language of Urdu. Therefore, I chose to recruit children that entered Canada through Pakistan. This was a purposeful choice as I was aware that most Afghan refugees living in Pakistan could communicate in Urdu. I had planned to make an extra copy of photographs with the consent of the family and the participant as it would be easier to transcribe the data and reflect on the text by referring to the pictures. However, the request was denied because the HREB

members felt that I would be putting the children in an awkward situation to consent to my request. There were seven participants and each of them had 10-15 pictures, which meant there were approximately 70-105 pictures. Therefore, I got the participants to describe the pictures in detail, audio-taped the conversations and wrote detailed notes in my journal as a substitute for my original intent.

I continued to update the three agencies regarding my progress to let them know that I still needed their support for recruiting the participants for my study. I identified three agencies and only one agency could facilitate recruitment as the other two could not find participants according to the criteria recommended by the HREB committee. Therefore, the participants were all Ismailis because they were recruited from only one agency. It should be noted that it took a full academic year to resolve the issues raised by HREB before I could proceed in conducting the study. I had initially proposed to use Critical theory (CT) as a theoretical framework but it was not appropriate to utilize it due to the changes suggested by the HREB. However, the cultural, political, economical and social issues were revealed to me by the children through *photo conversations*. Now as I review the findings of this study, I have come to the conclusion that the use of *photo conversations* allowed me to achieve a strong understanding of their experiences.

The findings of this study showed that the children loved participating in a *photo conversation* with me and at times, other family members. While the HREB was diligent in their concern of immense risks to the children, in fact, I found the

opposite to be true of this study. The children relished talking about their experiences with me, even the difficult ones.

For clarity of reading, the title of my study changed throughout the research process. First the proposed title was *Tales of living: Resilience in Afghan children* which, was changed to *Experiences of resilience through photo conversation with Afghan refugee children* for the candidacy exam and ethics approval process. The title of this study for the final oral became *Understanding the experiences of Ismaili Afghan refugee children through photo conversations*. Please note that the Health Ethics Review Board Approval form and the appendices have the title *Experiences of resilience through photo conversation with Afghan refugee children*.

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I thank my parents who made me resilient and I am sure that although they were not physically present in this world, I know that they watched over me and

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## **List of Acronyms**

AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AKU	Aga Khan University
AKU-SON	Aga Khan University in the School of Nursing
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FOCUS	Focus Humanitarian Assistance
HREB	Health Ethics Research Board
IHS	Institute of Health Sciences
IIS	The Institute of Ismaili Studies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OXO	Unexploded Ordnance
U of A	University of Alberta
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund

## CHAPTER ONE: COMING TO THE QUESTION

Wartime is no time to come helpless, innocent, and curious into the world, tragically, for millions of children this is their only reality. When war is literally in one's back yard and the enemy is everywhere and everyone, the issues of blame and loss are too large to comprehend, and certainly to cope with. Be that as it may, young witnesses to these peculiarly human cataclysms of conflict can and do survive and thrive. (Levine & Ion, 2002, p. 1)

Children and their family members experience substantial hardships when they are affected by individual, familial, or situational misfortunes such as poverty, war, and natural disasters that affect their future lives and livelihoods positively and negatively. Although many children have the potential to succumb to serious psychological and physical problems, a substantial number have the ability to withstand the negative pressures around them and grow up as competent, well-adjusted, and caring adults who are able to contribute to future generations and society at large (Garmezy, 1991; Werner, 1989; 1997).

I knew for some time before joining the doctoral program what my research question would be, or at least I knew that in some way I wanted to explore how children face and endure the daily struggles arising from adversity. Why does it seem that some children who face hardships appear to be tougher or more resilient than others despite similar circumstances? In my exploration of the phenomenon of resilience I have often been compelled to the consciousness of my own self and my responses to the adversity of poverty that I experienced. For example, I lived with four mentally challenged children along with my three siblings and my parents in a small apartment; depending on community welfare

system to meet our basic educational needs, and selling homemade food items prepared by my mother at my school and at various community festivals. As a child it was difficult to live and take care of the mentally challenged children and sell food items but I was also fully aware that it brought some income to meet the basic necessities of my family. Furthermore, we were living in the midst of extreme heat—40° C—and were unable to afford a refrigerator. Therefore, I had to request some ice or a bottle of cold water from our neighbor for my family members to quench our thirsts. Most of the time the lady, who graciously offered to give us cold water, was very accommodating; at other times she refused as she had none to spare; and at still other times her response and facial expressions made me feel as though I was begging. Facing the hardships during my childhood kept my inner drive alive to pursue higher education. This would allow me to get a stable job to earn enough money to sustain my family without having to be obliged to anyone else.

When I would complain to my father about our hardships he never admitted that we were poor. Using his own philosophical belief, he explained that the act of caring for mentally challenged children and getting the water from our neighbor was simple, and in return, we as a family and the lady next door received blessings from the Almighty. The actions of caring and getting the cold water may seem trivial for my father, but for me as an eight-year-old child it was a daily struggle. Why did my father or any of my family members not understand what I was experiencing? I wanted to scream out loud and resist at times but I

could not because my family was dependent on me. I had to cope with the hardships for 10 years until I moved to another city to pursue nursing as a career. A person requires coping skills to be psychologically resilient (Joseph, 1994). Throughout the hard times during my childhood I managed to adapt positively and became resilient. Therefore, exploring the experiences of children to adverse events is something very close to my heart.

Levine and Ion (2002) tell us that despite facing the adversities of war, children manage to survive as well as thrive. This led me to wonder how I could approach my research study. As Gadamer (1960/1989) suggests, the coming-to-the-question is a process of being taken to task on something, becoming more focused and disturbed, and then being opened to new possibilities that move beyond the initial breadth of the question. According to Gadamer, to question “is to open up possibilities and keep them open” (p. 299). Therefore, several questions triggered my thoughts. Does the notion of resilience as a research concept fully address my concern about Afghan children facing the adversities of war? I continued to ask: *Why* are children who are born into poverty and the adversity of war able to succeed in life in spite of the overwhelming circumstances? What are the roots of their adjustment or adaptation? I believed that if I could understand it better, I could work effectively in nursing and at the public health level to make a difference in the lives of children. My experience of working in the war-torn country of Afghanistan inspired me to address my research question further.



My personal observations during my work experience as a nurse consultant in Kabul, Afghanistan from June 2002 to July 2003 gave me insight into the lives of the Afghan people, most of whom have been able to sustain themselves in the midst of violence for over two decades. I had taken this employment while I was still enrolled as a part time student in doctoral studies at the University of Alberta in Canada. I worked at the Institute of Health Sciences (IHS), which is the main center situated in Kabul, Afghanistan, where nurses and midwives are trained. There is a total of eight other IHS within the country of Afghanistan. Under the aegis of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), part of my responsibility while working for AKU-SON, which is situated in Karachi, Pakistan, was to assess all the IHS in Afghanistan. Since traveling was a challenge, I was able to assess only three centers out of the eight. From my travels in Afghanistan, the vivid images of the horrific consequences of war are permanently engraved in my mind. I observed Afghan children and their family members struggling and still surviving in the midst of multiple adversities such as the destruction of infrastructures, landmine injuries, inaccessible health care services, and enforced poverty because of war and lack of employment. Afghan families worried about their children's future while having to survive in their war-torn country. War is equivalent to living in hell.

I was still floundering with my research question when one morning, as I was leaving for work in Kabul, I observed an Afghan child approximately eight years old carrying a pail of water. I realized that my experience was nothing

compared to that of this Afghan child, who probably had a long way to go to deliver this heavy load of water to her family. As she stood there staring at me, my childhood experience of fetching cold water for my family was mirrored in her eyes, yearning to tell someone what it feels like to carry the load of water every day. It dawned on me that what I needed to do was to listen to what the Afghan children had to say about their experiences of living in adversity. My desire was ignited to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of resilience from the Afghan children living in Afghanistan. When I returned to Canada in July 2003 after completion of my employment in Afghanistan I discussed with my supervisory committee members my intent of conducting my research study in Afghanistan. However, due to safety and security issues the committee advised that I should study the Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada.

According to Garbarino, Kostelny, and Dubrow (1991) children that survive the horrendous heat of war provide evidence of their resilience as well as the efforts of the parents, relatives, friends, teachers, and therapists who care for them. In addition other pioneer researchers such as Garmezy and Masten (1986), Rutter (1987), and Werner (1993) have also posed the questions; why are some children more resilient than others, and why do they thrive despite the challenge of adversity? Before I finalized my research question, I ploughed through the literature to understand the phenomenon of resilience.

## **The Phenomenon of Resilience**

Scholars have defined *resilience* in a number of ways. Initially, resilience was viewed as a personal trait of individuals who are at risk but continue to have high self-esteem (Masten & Garmezy, 1985) and demonstrate competence or adjustment (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) despite their circumstances.

*Competence* results from “complex interactions between a child and his or her environment” and is influenced by “both the child’s capabilities and the nature of the contexts in which the child lives” (Masten & Coatsworth, p. 206). Mangham, Reid, McGrath, and Stewart (1995) further expanded the definition of resilience to the level of family and community. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) define resilience as a dynamic process in which positive adjustment is made in spite of adversity and involves a balance between unfavorable and protective factors or processes that protect or buffer individuals under risk conditions from negative outcomes. Researchers (Greenburg, 2006; Masten & Obradovic, 2006) in their literature review have consistently identified that protective factors fall under three broad categories such as: individual characteristics of a child for example, temperament, intelligence or cognition; positive relationships of the child; and, broader environmental factors, such as safe neighborhood and quality schools. Drummond and Marcellus (2003) identified resilience as the outcome of the relationships or interactions between adverse and shielding processes for individuals, families and communities.

Researchers (Luthar, et al., 2000; Mangham et al., 1995; Masten, 2001) have offered various definitions of resilience, with the consistent association of experiencing significant stress or adversity with positive outcomes or adaptation by an individual, family, or community. From these definitions, the challenge becomes one of identifying the unique characteristics of resilient children that enable them to overcome adversity and maintain competence despite the fact that other children in similar circumstances have succumbed to the challenges surrounding them.

Two conditions are required to identify resilience: (a) the individual's exposure to significant adversity or threat such as war, poverty, or loss of a parent; and (b) the developmental outcome that the individual is doing well or adapting despite experiencing or having experienced hardship (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001). It is vital to remember that "one would not expect a resilient person, however defined at one point in time, to be doing well every minute of the day, under all imaginable circumstances or in perpetuity" (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 4). However, the processes of building resilience may strengthen the capacity of children, families, and communities to cope with stressful life events in the future (Luthar et al., 2000). As a consequence of coping with each unique experience in daily life, individuals develop further coping strategies making an impact on resilience. In addition, resilience allows the individual to have the capability to overcome adversity and bounce back from a dysfunctional state to normal functioning (McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, Han, & Allen, 1997).

Therefore, to understand the phenomenon of resilience, it is extremely important to explore resilience processes among Afghan refugee children to understand if current resilience literature is applicable or transferable to them. Here I sought experiential stories from the children to hear how they developed various strategies to cope with day to day life in order to adapt well or become resilient in the different environments. But from early in the study, I also knew that the children would tell me what they wanted to tell me.

Each child, whose life has been touched by warfare, if given an opportunity to be heard, has a unique and precious story to tell (Garbarino et al., 1991). In addition, it is likely that embedded within their experiential stories is the essence of resilience in historical, social, cultural, and political contexts. As Garbarino et al. (1991) asserts, rarely are children asked to talk about their experiences of surviving war. Nurse researchers are in a distinctive position to listen to the stories of these Afghan children and explore their responses to adverse situations of war. I was drawn to my research question as I felt the urge to hear what these children had to say about their experiences of living in the aftermath of war and not to overlay my question with research concepts already developed by other countries and cultures. The literature surely informed my study, but I also wanted, what Gadamer (1960/1989) has suggested, to stay open to the question and where it might lead.

## The Question

I continued to envision the Afghan child carrying the pail of water as well as my personal experience during my childhood of wanting to share my issues and struggle when no one cared to listen. I then wondered if anyone took the time to listen to the Afghan children currently living in Canada and what they were experiencing. What was the nature of the issues or struggles of everyday living? How did they survive the adversities of war such as destruction of infrastructure, the lack of food and heating, and the disrupted health care? What did they perceive as their needs to ensure a better future?

The Health Ethics Research Board (HREB) had concerns that children would be re-traumatized if I asked the children about life in Afghanistan or if I used probing questions such as the ones I pondered above. Rather than a question on relating to resilience, I re-formulated the core question to read: *What are the experiences of Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada in the aftermath of war?*<sup>1</sup> To fully answer this research question required addressing a sub question: *How do Afghan refugee children describe their experiences of day-to-day life?* These questions reflect my commitment to describe and further explore the experiences of living and the nature of resilience in Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada.

Consequently, exploring the answers to the core question and the sub question fulfilled the purpose of this study: (1) to understand the phenomenon of

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<sup>1</sup> *Aftermath of war* refers to the experiences of Afghan children in the transitional country of Pakistan and in the settlement country of Canada.

resilience in an exploratory way through *photo conversations* with regard to how Afghan refugee children adapt despite facing the adversities in the aftermath of war; and, (2) to contribute to the knowledge development in nursing science and nursing practice for healthy childhood development. In addition, the knowledge gained from this study will assist me in undertaking the nursing education work that I intend to pursue in Afghanistan. It also allows me, as a nurse researcher, to be a spokesperson at various forums for the Afghan refugee children to bring about awareness of the resources required to build resilience and enhance health and well-being of these children and others who have survived war.

### **Summary**

Coming to the question, I pondered upon my initial planning of the research question I had in mind prior to joining the doctoral program. My lived experience of poverty, working in Afghanistan and observing the child carrying the water pail further confirmed my decision to focus my research on asking the children themselves about their experiences of living in the aftermath of war. I wondered how these children were able to survive the adversities of war and therefore in this chapter I also discussed the phenomenon of resilience. As this was an exploratory study, resilience literature informed my work.

In chapter two I review the literature relevant to the impact of war on Afghan children in particular and refugee children in general. I also elaborate further on the research available on resilience in children.

## CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE LITERATURE

Elisa a 17-year-old girl shared her view of war at the United Nations Special Session: *“War and politics have always been an adult game but children have always been the losers. I hope you will remember my words.”* (UNICEF, 2002, p. 1)

In this chapter I examine the research relevant to the experiences of Afghan children and their families from the historical context of the wars in Afghanistan in addition to research studies of children facing adversities in the aftermath of war. I also review the literature to clarify certain terms used in my research study. The phenomenon of resilience is further explored to identify which factors facilitate in overcoming adversity in the lives of children. I begin with a brief summary of the history of Afghanistan including over two decades of war, followed by research related to the adversities of war that may have affected the Afghan refugee children living in Canada.

### Historical Context

Elisa in the above quote at the beginning of chapter 2 tells us her view of experiencing war and begs us to remember her words of war. Therefore, understanding the history of Afghanistan is a prerequisite for appreciating the impact of wars on Afghan children and their families. According to Maley (2006) Ahmed Shah Durrani was the founder of Afghanistan in 1747 and then was ruled by Abdul Rahman Khan from 1880 to 1901; the country got its independence from British control in 1919. Furthermore, Afghanistan was a peaceful country for almost 50 years and Mohammed Zahir Shah was the King of Afghanistan



during this time from 1933, for nearly 40 years until overthrown by his cousin Muhammad Daoud in July 1973 and then the country of Afghanistan remained fragile until the communist coup in April 1978.

From this point Afghanistan encountered three waves of war. The first wave was a long destructive war by the Soviets (1979-1989) followed by the resistance groups, the Mujahideen (1990-1995). “A new wave of war then engulfed the country, of a transnational variety” ((Maley, 2002, p. 1). The beneficiaries were the Taliban (1996-2001), backed by forces from the neighboring country of Pakistan. The third wave of war affected Afghanistan as the United States of America (USA) organized an air invasion that wiped out the Taliban regime from Afghanistan within two months (Maley, 2002). The Bonn Conference sponsored by the UN in 2001 facilitated a process for political reconstruction and in December 2004, Hamid Karzi became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan and the inauguration of the National Assembly occurred in December 2005 (CIA, 2008). In spite of the gains toward building a stable central government and assistance from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), in stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan there is continuing instability; the resurgence of Taliban with an increase in suicide bombings making the country further volatile (Morelli & Gallis, 2008).

These wars have devastated most of the country and not only compromised the safety and well-being of the entire population but also ruined

the very roots of their lives and livelihoods. Summing Afghanistan's problems for over two decades of disruptions can never be told in depth in a few pages.

Although, I found some discrepancies in the texts about the time lines of each wave of war, I will attempt to trace the course of Afghanistan's waves of war as best as I can, mainly to illustrate the impact on the lives of the Afghan children and their families.

### **Waves of War**

In this section I describe the waves of war with its own escalation of compounding challenges for the people of Afghanistan: the Soviet-Afghan war/Soviet rule (1979-1989), the civil wars/Mujahideen rule (approx. 1990-1995), and the Taliban rule (1996-2001). The quest for coherence (2001-present) in Afghanistan continues with the country still being volatile and under occupation by international military and peacekeeping forces.

#### ***Soviet-Afghan War/Soviet Rule (1979-1989)***

Although the Soviets successfully invaded Afghanistan in 1979, they faced significant sustainable Afghan resistance from Mujahideen parties for almost a decade until they were finally defeated in 1989. Pakistan played a significant role in allowing some resistance groups to base their operations in its country (Maley, 2002; 2006).

Major funding to support the war against the Soviets came from the Golden Crescent drug trade in which poppy seeds were grown in Afghanistan and special laboratories in the bordering country of Pakistan were set up for heroin

production. The CIA controlled the assets of the export of heroin, and by 1987 there was a noticeable, steady rise of 65,000 tons of military aid annually to the Mujahideens (Chossudovsky, 2002). The USA provided special military training to the Mujahideens and continued to fund the Madrassah religious schools to provide human resources in the form of soldiers to fight the war (Baumann, 2001; Chossudovsky, 2002).

This decade of brutal power struggle led to the frightening consequences of multiple infrastructure breakdowns such as loss of electricity, the closure of universities and schools, and the loss of production facilities. There was also major loss of related human resources as professionals fled the country with their children and families to ensure their safety. The Afghans took refuge in the neighboring countries of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

#### ***Civil Wars/Mujahideen Rule (Approx. 1990-1995)***

Eventually, the Mujahideen militant Islamic forces were able to overthrow the Soviets with the support from the neighboring country of Pakistan, CIA and the USA, which resulted in massive civil war within Afghanistan (Chossudovsky, 2002; Maley 2002; 2006). There was fighting among internal factions for power and control of Kabul, the capital. This resulted in further displacement of the people and accelerated the infrastructure destruction of schools, homes, businesses, and hospitals; and there was no hiatus to allow for recuperation from the previous wave of war with the Soviets (Maley 2002; 2006). At the end of 1995, the Taliban, Muslim fundamentalists, defeated the Mujahideen.

### ***Taliban Rule (1996-2001)***

The Taliban initially brought some stability to the country of Afghanistan through a process of enforcing strict rules. After a year the Taliban implemented laws based on more extreme interpretations of the *Quran* in relation to the role of women in society, which resulted in banning women from going to school or even to work. Moreover, the Taliban refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to the USA, and this created another wave of war in Afghanistan (Chossudovsky, 2002; Maley, 2006).

The USA-led operation to overthrow Taliban rule was yet another struggle through which the people of Afghanistan suffered. Although it was very clearly identified that the operation was not targeted against civilians, it affected numerous Afghan civilians, who reported their houses being bombed twice and losing family members either during the bombing or from being frozen during the winter months (War Child Canada, 2004).

### ***Quest for Coherence (2001-Present)***

The underlying assumption of coherence is an attempt to attend to “fundamental issues concerning the rationale of peace-making and peace-building efforts as well as the purposes, principles, and functions of assistance in post-ceasefire or post-regime-change situations” (Donini, Niland, & Wermester, 2004, p. 3). It includes bringing together humanitarian and human rights actions as well as “harmonization or merging of objectives, strategies, and programming tools

within and across relevant actors so that they are all geared toward the pursuit of a common end goal or in line with an articulated vision” (Donini et al., p. 3).

One attempt for the quest of coherence was the Strategic Framework (SF) in the late 1990s from an international response to crisis during the Taliban- ruled Afghanistan; to connect the peace-making, humanitarian, and human rights function of the United Nations (UN). Similarly the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), based on agreed-upon interventions for peace known as the Bonn Agreement of 2001, replaced the SF and became operational in early 2001 (Donini et al., 2004). The Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) of NATO in Afghanistan works in close co-ordination with the Commander of the ISAF, the UNAMA, including the Afghan authorities, and the international community present in the country (NATO, 2006). Individual contributions by each country change on a regular basis with the rotation of troops, but they are not sufficient to control the warlords throughout the rural areas. In August 2003 NATO, through its leadership of the ISAF, assumed peacekeeping responsibility, and the troops appeared to maintain some stability. ISAF was also assisting in training the new Afghan National Army and National Police, rehabilitating schools and medical facilities, restoring water supplies, and providing agricultural technical assistance (NATO, 2006). The NATO Allies, including Canadian military troops, continue to fight Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan (CBC, January 22, 2008).

Although in 2001 Taliban rule came to an end with USA-led bombing, the country remains volatile. Innocent children and their families continue to suffer greatly from the after effects of the bombing. Moreover, the continuous waves of war have led to the displacement of Afghanistan's people, internally as well as externally. War has resulted in vast infrastructure destruction to homes, hospitals, schools, markets, and business buildings. It has also made the land of Afghanistan uninhabitable for its people. This is not only because of the thousands of existing landmines that endanger the lives of Afghans but also because of the destruction of food-producing land and sewage systems with the consequence of contamination or poisoning of the water systems (Maley, 2006). These waves of war have lasted for over two decades and forced many children and families to flee from their homes and their homeland of Afghanistan to face adversity in new countries without consistent material, human, or financial support.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this section I first define certain terms for clarity of understanding when used in relation to resilience, followed by exploration of the literature relevant to the adversities of war and those faced by Afghans. Definitions of terms are taken from literature review as well as the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). (2000). Definitions of certain terms are as follows:

*Adversity* refers to experiences or events that are likely to disrupt the normal functioning of individuals and cause undesirable negative effects or outcomes on individuals. In addition, adversity also represent *risk factors* such as

homelessness, dangerous environment, and growing up in poverty that often negatively affects the health and well-being of children as well as their development and *adaptation* (Riley & Masten, 2005).

*Coping* is the act of facing and dealing with the stresses of *adversity* successfully (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000a) and leads to *resilience* or positive *adaptation* (Garbarino et al., 1991). “More specifically, coping is the mental effort and physical actions applied to managing those events, people, and situations that we perceive as negative or potentially negative” (Joseph, 1994, p. 36).

*Adaptation* is a dynamic process in which the behavior and physiological mechanisms of an individual continually change to adjust to stressful experiences or variations in living conditions (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000b).

*Adaptation* is also judged according to accomplishment of developmental tasks or milestones; for example, school adjustment in middle childhood.

Judgment of *competence* or adaptive outcome is also dependent on the severity of adversity faced within a given time frame (Riley & Masten, 2005).

*Competence* or social competence denotes a variety of adaptive behaviors. In addition competence also means *positive outcomes* or success of an individual in meeting societal expectations and individual personal development (Garmezy, 1991).

*Positive outcome* occurs when individuals use problem solving skills, increase support networks, and seek help when needed to overcome adverse

circumstances and achieve a state of physical and/or mental wellness.

Consequently, the individual who experiences positive outcomes is able to achieve a better level of adaptation in spite of facing adversities (Kaplan, 1999).

### **Adversities of War**

Growing up in a war-torn country and having to face the consequences of war are examples of experiencing adversity as they disrupt normal functioning. Afghanistan, one of the poorest nations in the world, has undergone a profound humanitarian crisis with thousands of Afghans killed during the communist rule (Maley, 2006). According to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, the number of Afghan refugees escalated from 600,000 in 1979 to 1.9 million by the end of 1980 (Maley, 2002); the total peaked at the end of 1992 to approximately 6.3 million (UNHCR, 1993) out of the pre-invasion population of 15 million (World Development Indicators, 1978). These numbers of Afghan refugees displaced outside the country are significant as they make approximately 42% of the total population. Most Afghans took refuge in Iran and Pakistan. The majority of the Afghan refugee population of approximately 3.3 million fled to Pakistan (UNHCR, 2002). These Afghan refugees have had no choice but to live in refugee camps, in urban squatter settlements, or on the streets. The majority of them were women and children (Baumann, 2001; Bhutta, 2002; Halimi, 2002).

According to the latest UNHCR report of February 2008, approximate 2 million Afghans repatriated to Afghanistan in the early 1990s but there was



movement back to Pakistan due to the Mujahideen and Taliban rule. Yet again after the fall of the Taliban regime since 2002, approximately 3 million Afghans returned to their homeland under the UNHCR-assisted voluntary program.

However, by the end of January 2008 1.9 million are still living in Pakistan and 0.9 million in Iran. In addition, over one million Afghan refugees are living in different countries such as India (9,447), Uzbekistan (1,415) in Asia, United Kingdom (22,651), Germany (21,829), Netherlands (21,329), Denmark (6,302), Sweden (4,267), Norway (4,056), Austria (3,661), Hungary (2,354), Egypt (31), Canada (14,419), USA (13,242), and Australia (7,904).

War has an impact on every aspect of a child's life, which even in the aftermath of war affects health, education, nurturance, and protection by the family and the community who do not have any control over their lives (Machel, 2001). The nature of Afghanistan's problems are such that the actual course of events will never be told because of simultaneous adversities of war, such as the destruction of infrastructure, the debilitation of the environment, and increased morbidity and mortality of the population. The people of Afghanistan are not only physically and emotionally wounded, but also have to bear the consequences of the different waves of war (Bearak, 2002).

The Afghan refugee children who have managed to flee Afghanistan with their families to the neighboring country of Pakistan continue to face a number of adversities in their lives, including homelessness (Halimi, 2002), loss of educational opportunity (Berry et al., 2003; Schleicher, 2003), posttraumatic

stress disorder ([PTSD] Mghir, Freed, Raskin, & Katon, 1995; Rahman & Hafeez, 2003), incapacitation due to mental health, (Gupta, 1997), loss of family (Bearak, 2002), malnutrition (Eltom, 2001; Wallace et al., 2002), infectious diseases (Ahmad, 2002, 2003; Reithinger et al., 2003), and injuries from landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (OXO) (UNHCR, 2008). Considering that these are the major adversities that children face, it is imperative to discuss each of them in detail.

### *Homelessness*

Families have been forced to flee from their homes to unfamiliar surroundings where they are subjected to the harsh conditions of living in refugee camps surrounded by desert. Halimi (2002) was a medical Afghan student studying in the USA who worked in the summer of 1998 and 2001 at the refugee camps in Pakistan and observed that the closest medical help may be in a city at least three hours away. In addition families experienced excruciating heat, no running water or electricity, and inadequate food supplies. In these horrendous circumstances children suffered from severe dehydration and malnutrition. Some of these refugee camps have been in existence for over a decade. Some children are born in refugee camps which mean that they have spent their entire childhood living under such circumstances.

Some refugee camps were worse than others. Halimi (2002) reported that on the day that he worked at Camp Jalozi, which was 15 miles from the city of Peshawar in Pakistan, 60,000 new refugees had just arrived with no preplanned

arrangements. Having suffered the loss of their safe homes and valuables and feeling insecure to the very core of their being, they had to make do living in tents made out of plastic bags, blankets, and branches. Although they were refugees with no sources of income and with not enough food to survive, they were charged five rupees (US \$0.14) a night to camp in a riverbed where there was a risk of drowning. As evidence that health issues are overwhelming in Afghan refugee communities, Halimi saw over 800 patients on only the first day of his visit.

In Camp Jalozei even international aid seems to be insufficient to prevent children, the most vulnerable, from dying of starvation and disease (Halimi, 2002). Refugee homelessness leads to immediate poverty, followed by ill health and dramatically increased morbidity and mortality. In such gross circumstances, the Afghan refugees cannot think of sending, or cannot afford to send, their children to school, which would act as a protective factor; they have no choice but to accept the loss of opportunity for education as an adversity in their lives.

### ***Loss of Opportunity for Education***

Fear of kidnap, rape, being caught in crossfire, or stepping on landmines makes traveling to school dangerous for both students and teachers, and life becomes focused on survival (Sommers, 2002). The destruction of the educational infrastructure during war is a deliberate strategy to break the stability and sense of continuity in the lives of helpless children. According to Schleicher (2003) almost 70% of the schools in Afghanistan have been destroyed and approximately 1.5

million children cannot attend classes. Moreover, the remaining 30% of schools need of major repairs, including installation of facilities for drinking water, electricity, and sanitation. There is a lack of teachers who have probably left during the wars because of the volatile environment (Schleicher, 2003). Can children from war-torn countries pursue an education when they are fleeing or hiding to be safe? What choices exist if children desire to go to school? It becomes extremely difficult to continue with schooling when families flee their homeland for safety because of lack of funds and lack of opportunity.

Schooling provides a sense of stability for children in the form of employment and may predict stable lifetime income in the later years (Machel, 2001; Sommers, 2002). The loss of opportunity for education in the early years becomes a permanent loss of the future. The children who missed several years of schooling because of war are now older and therefore probably finding it very difficult to pursue further education. In addition a generation of girls, denied education during the Taliban rule, continue to have no choice except to play the traditional roles of wife, mother, or laborer (Schleicher, 2003). Their future seems to be bleaker than some of the younger children.

During their research study Berry et al. (2003) questioned Afghan children regarding the effects of war in Afghanistan. A boy in the youth group commented, “I feel very disappointed. . . . If there had been no war I would have been in the 12th class by now” (p. 24), and a *16-year-old girl* reported:

One day I went for my lessons, the Taliban's car stopped near us, [but] we escaped before they beat us, and when we got home we were very afraid and we all got sick. Now when I go to the course and see a car I still think it might be the Taliban's car. (p. 25)

As these quotations demonstrate, the impact of the experience of the waves of war continues to splinter the daily activities of these children. The war-related experience that the *16-year old girl* described above and the stress or anxiety that follows can be very complex and difficult to overcome for many years. The experience of facing the adversities of war may never end for some.

Depending on the age of the child, the extent of the exposure, and the intensity of the cruelty experienced or witnessed during war, the mental and physical health of Afghan children is at a great risk. Children who have managed to survive the war have to deal with the horrors they have witnessed. To achieve greater insight into these adversities, I will further examine the psychological effects of wars on children.

### ***Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)***

The physical effects of war and the terrifying experiences of surviving are very overwhelming for children and therefore attending to their mental health is recognized as important in the recovery and development of children. Recently, more research studies have treated mental well-being as not a separate issue but as a contributor to health in general. For example, some studies have linked poor mental health to PTSD, depression, and poor physical health (Derluyn, Broekaert, Schuyten, & De Temmerman, 2004; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2004).

The range of trauma that Afghan children and their family members experience is tremendous. Children who are affected are those born during the first wave of war that are now parents or grandparents, those born in the second and third waves who now range from infants to young adults, and those who either stayed in the country or fled from the war-torn areas. The demoralizing experiences of war during childhood may have continued into adulthood, and now, as parents, those children who were raised during times of conflict have the responsibility for raising their children in the same war-torn zones or in a strange country away from home as refugees often with fear, material or financial resources. Additionally, returning to the country even for some time and re-experiencing the vivid and horrendous memories of war may have negative psychological consequences for both adults and children who fled the country earlier.

These multiple variables and experiences of the different waves of war among Afghan children create a pervasive yet sometimes an unspoken dilemma for health care staff: How do we identify and manage mental health issues within an environment where physical survival takes precedence? How do we address PTSD or depression within a population that is at varying stages of dealing with trauma? Afghan children live under a cultural standard that expects silence and stoicism and does not acknowledge the lifelong consequences of untreated mental health issues.

Pfefferbaum (1997) examined the literature on children over 10 years and reported that PTSD has been identified in children who have been exposed to traumatic adversities. Children demonstrate the traumatic event repeatedly during play and experience nightmares and significant impaired functioning of normal activities. War has been clearly identified in many studies as contributing to mental health issues such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression (Derluyn et al., 2004; Mghir, Freed, Raskin, & Katon, 1995; Qouta, Punamaki, & El Sarraj, 2003). For example, Sack, Clarke, and Seeley (1995) examined two generations of Cambodian refugees who had settled in Salt Lake City, USA. The results of the study suggested that there was a significant clustering of PTSD symptomatology not only in the parents, but also in their children, which indicates an intergenerational impact of war-related trauma for the family.

Qouta et al. (2003) examined the prevalence and determinants of PTSD among Palestinian children (6 - 16 years) and their mothers in the Gaza strip after they lost their homes. The mothers and their children witnessed shootings, killings, and funerals and suffered from various levels of PTSD. Qouta et al. confirmed the consequences of the experiences of war for the children's mental status. Additional studies have found that women are more prone to PTSD than men are and that they are also more susceptible to PTSD in childhood than they are after age 15 (Breslau, Davis, Andreski, Peterson, & Schultz, 1997). From a child's perspective, maternal depression and poverty appear to have a mediating effect on the cognitive development of young boys and girls of approximately two

to four years of age (Petterson & Albers, 2001). Both children and parents are at high risk of developing PTSD and depression, which may have negative consequences for the development and health of children.

Most of the Afghan children and their family members who were able to flee from the atrocities of the wars are returning to their war-torn homeland as adults. Even when they are removed from the immediate environment of conflict, mental trauma is easily triggered in children and adults who have lived through the experience of war. For example, Kinzie, Boehnlein, Riley, and Sparr (2002) examined ethnically diverse groups of refugees from Cambodia, Laotia, Bosnia, and Somalia who had already suffered from PTSD to determine their responses to the televised images of the September 11, 2001 event in New York. They found that reactivating the traumatic experience had an impact on the refugees: They felt threatened for their safety and security. These results show the continued vulnerability of refugees to PTSD symptomatology when they are exposed to traumatic stimuli. This would probably be the same for children who did not experience war first hand. The Afghan children living in Afghanistan and as refugees elsewhere are no exception.

### ***Mental Health in Afghan Children***

Studies of Afghan children from a mental health perspective reveal significant war-related effects. Mghir et al. (1995) found a strong correlation between the number of traumatic events experienced and PTSD among Afghan refugees between the ages of 12 and 24. Rahman and Hafeez (2003) found that



Afghan mothers caring for young children in refugee camps in Pakistan suffered from severe mental distress because of the lack of material and financial resources. Of these mothers, 91% had suicidal thoughts, which can have serious long-term effects on the psychological and physical development of their children. The authors further noted that six months prior to the study, none of these women had been diagnosed or treated for any psychological problems. These findings suggest the prevalence of psychological disorders in Afghan refugees.

In another study Gupta (1997) interviewed 300 children between the ages of 8 and 18 in Kabul, Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996, and revealed that most children had witnessed acts of violence and experienced their homes being destroyed by bombing and shelling and that 40% of these children had lost a parent. The brutality of war had convinced 90% of the children in the study to believe that they would die before adulthood, and 67% trusted adults less than they had before the fighting. Fifty percent of the children in this study also cited *fear* as their strongest emotion, and the majority of the children suffered nightmares, anxiety and loss of concentration, loss of appetite, and a decreased desire or lack of ability to play. Factors such as sleep, adequate nutrition, security, and play as learning are critical for growth in all general child-development theories. Without the above mentioned factors, Afghan children will have little or no opportunity to develop physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

### *Loss of Family*

Bearak (2002) wrote a story about Afghanistan in the *New York Times* newspaper on March 08, 2002 about hunger outliving money. A father had to sell his farm animals first, then his family rugs and cooking utensils, and finally, in desperation, had to trade (barter) two of his 10 children for bags of wheat. This trend of exchanging children for a constant supply of cash or wheat has become common during these hard times. There is no guarantee that the children will be well fed and looked after even with promises from the buyers, as a 10-year-old son who was the victim of bartering related to his father when he met him on the street:

They do not treat me well. . . . I work very hard and during the night they send me into the mountains to sleep with the sheep. . . . I felt bad that I was sold; . . . I cried. Sometimes, I still cry at night. But I understand why the selling of me was necessary. . . I must go now. . . I must hurry or they will beat me. (Bearak, 2002, p. 1)

Loss occurs in many ways, including through bombing, torture, landmines, displacement, starvation, and being listed as missing (Joshi & O'Donnell, 2003). Sometimes Afghan families have had to make heartbreaking choices purposefully to let go of some of their children by bartering them or abandoning them to an orphanage so that the rest of the family can survive. Some children themselves have had to make hard choices such as joining the army, in whatever capacity, to earn money for the family, and possibly never return. Some examples of the consequences of these adverse events for children and their families are as one Afghan child states: “We tried to send our small brother to the

orphanage, but they would not accept him so instead we all make carpets and it is very hard” (Berry et al., 2003, p. 39). Zaralaam, a 14-year-old military policeman who works in Kandahar, a city in Afghanistan, at a security checkpoint to earn money for his family, explained that, “it’s tough working day and night, but I earn 2,000 Afghanis [US \$40] a month and get some food too” (United Nations [UN] Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN] News, 2003, ¶ 1). A mother also related her story:

I have 5 children of my own and am also now taking care of 2 of my sister’s children. She and her husband were killed in the war, so I am the only one their children have left. I don’t have any food for myself, but when I do find some I don’t know who to give it to first. If I split it with everyone, there will be nothing left. (Halimi, 2002, p. 201)

There are many such stories that challenge the social fabric of Afghan families and their community and make our souls weep. Children are victims of cruel circumstances and are expected to bear the brunt of living in harsh conditions. Many children find themselves in the most horrific situations and have to face being homeless, losing their family, not knowing where they will find comfort and security, and not being able to eat a proper meal. Some survive the horrid circumstances, but at what cost?

### ***Malnutrition***

Humanitarian-assistance groups have been concerned about starvation among the Afghans who depend on cultivation and whose agricultural infrastructure was destroyed. In addition to the drought and famine during the fall of 2001, American bombing not only led to homelessness and loss of family, but

also hindered the delivery of emergency food to the Afghans. Many died of hunger, and others survived like animals, eating grass and weeds (Bearak, 2002).

Before September 11, 2001, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assisted 150,000 Afghans in six camps located in Herat (which borders Iran) who had been internally displaced by conflict and drought. A health report compiled for the week ending September 16, 2001, from one camp alone recorded 65 malnourished children admitted to supplementary feeding centers, 275 children receiving oral rehydration therapy, and five deaths (Eltom, 2001). With winter approaching, the Afghan children living in various camps would starve to death or succumb to health risks such as diarrhea diseases, malnutrition, and preventable infectious diseases.

There was concern about the spread of malnutrition in November 2001 in the Chagcharan district of Ghor province in Afghanistan when there was no external assistance for three months. A rapid health assessment was completed in the town of Chagcharan in December 2001 to further assess malnutrition among children younger than five years old. It was found that malnutrition was significantly higher in younger children aged 6 to 29 months than in those aged 30 to 59 months and that 51.8% of those aged 6 to 59 months suffered from chronic malnutrition (Wallace et al., 2002). Miller et al. (1994) conducted another study among the Afghan refugee population of women and their families who attended a maternal child health clinic in Quetta, Pakistan. The researchers found that 67% of the children were severely malnourished. These data clearly indicate the high

prevalence of malnutrition among children if they do not receive food, and the continuous waves of war escalate the intensity and number of adversities that further affect the health of Afghan children. According to the CIA World Fact Book (2005, 2008), the demographics of Afghanistan present an abysmal state of affairs (Figure 1). According to a UNICEF (2008) humanitarian action update on Afghanistan, the infant mortality rate under 5 years of age in 2006 was 257/1000 live births and the maternal mortality ratio was 1600/100,000 live births.

Total population:	29,928,987 (2005); 32,738,376 (July 2008)
Life expectancy:	42.9 years (2005); 44.21 (2008)
Age: 0-14 years (41.8%); (44.6) (2008 est):	Male 6,842,857 (2005); 7,474,394 (2008) Female 6,524,485 (2005); 7,121,145 (2008)
Age: 15-64 years (55.4%); (53%) (2008 est):	Male 8,124,077 (2005); 8,901,880 (2008) Female 7,713,603 (2005); 8,447,983 (2008)
Birth rate:	47.02-births/1,000 population (2005) 45.82 births/1,000 population (2008 est.)
Infant mortality rate:	163.07 deaths/1,000 live births (2005) 154.67 deaths/1,000 live births (2008 est.)
Under-5 mortality rate:	208.8/1000 live births (2005) 257/1000 live births (2006)
Maternal mortality ratio:	1600/100,000 live births (2005, 2008)
Fertility rate:	6.75 children born/woman (2005) 6.58 children born/woman (2008 est.)

*Figure 1.* Demographics of Afghanistan (adapted from CIA World Fact Book, 2005, 2008; UNICEF, 2008).

The infrastructure destruction also prohibits income-earning capacity and makes the living environment deplorable. The breakdown of sewage-disposal

systems and the clean-water systems increases the vulnerability of children who are already weak from starvation to infectious diseases.

### ***Infectious Diseases***

Afghans have had no choice but to live in crowded and unhygienic conditions for over two decades. Health care facilities lack basic vaccination equipment and trained human resources to treat sick children; therefore, only the fittest survive. Most Afghan children and their families have had to save their lives through forced migration. Traveling has added more strain to the health of already sick children. Living under these pathetic conditions of no choice and little access to resources make the children easy targets for infectious diseases. Some of the frequently occurring infectious diseases among the Afghan population are: (a) food- and water-borne diseases such as bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, cholera, hepatitis A and E, typhoid, and paratyphoid fever caused by poor sanitation throughout the country; (b) vector-borne diseases, especially in high temperatures, such as malaria, hemorrhagic fever, cutaneous leishmaniasis, and typhus; (c) respiratory-borne diseases especially in cold weather and overcrowded conditions, such as measles, diphtheria, meningitis, influenza, tuberculosis, and acute respiratory infections, which lead to high mortality among children under five; and (d) other diseases such as poliomyelitis, anthrax, leptospirosis, and rabies (Ahmad, 2003; Ahmad, 2002; Assefa, Jabarkhil, Salama, & Spiegel, 2001; CIA World Fact Book, 2005; Reithinger et al., 2003). Contracting any of these infectious diseases makes life extremely difficult for

children and their families, especially when the basic health infrastructures are destroyed as a consequence of the waves of war.

UNICEF and WHO, in collaboration with NGOs, have begun vaccination efforts after identifying priorities with regard to some of the diseases, but it will take years to cover the whole population because the diseases spread faster than preventive measures can keep up due to the lack of materials and financial resources. For example, medicine for cutaneous leishmaniasis, which is spread by sandflies with humans being the reservoir, is not a priority for international donors because the disease does not cause death as often as other common infectious diseases. Although it is expensive to treat and not a killer disease, it has consequences for future life because it leaves scars on the face and this can affect the chances of girls getting married (Ahmad, 2003; Ahmad, 2002; Reithinger et al., 2003). These are not the only burdens that Afghan children and their family members face. In addition, most areas of Afghanistan are full of landmines that lead to physical injury and mortality.

### ***Landmine Injuries and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)***

Land mines are often purposely laid around structures that provide basic needs and are of economic importance, such as industrial buildings, roads, sources of water, and farmland. UXOs are usually located on the surface, which makes them more visible and therefore attractive to children. This includes grenades, bombs, mortar shells, and ammunition that were scattered during military activities and failed to explode.

Landmines have been used extensively since World War II. Afghanistan is the most highly affected country and is considered to have the highest number of landmines in the world—an estimated 5 million to 7 million mines. The vast majority of landmines were placed during Soviet rule from 1979-1989, and approximately 200,000 Afghans have been killed or wounded by mines over the two decades of war (Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report [MMWR], 2003). More recent data will be discussed later in this section.

Andersson, da Sousa, and Paredes (1995) conducted surveys in accessible areas of Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Mozambique and reported that one third of the mine victims die at the explosion site and that 1 in 10 are children. The incidence of landmine injuries is under reported because only those victims who reach clinics and hospitals are counted. Some of the reasons for not reaching the hospitals could be lack of transportation, the unavailability or destruction of health services, lack of finances, and instant death. In addition, the number of children killed by friendly and enemy fire is not accurately reported.

The MMWR (2003) of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that annually from 1997 to 2002, landmines have injured at least 1,000 Afghans; over half of them are children. In 2002 over 1,600 Afghans were injured with landmines, with half the injuries occurring in children. Landmines and UXO have caused acute and long-term physical disability and psychological distress among children (Andersson et al., 1995; Bilukha, Brennan, & Woodruff, 2003; Harris, 2002). The experience of those injured by landmines is devastating.



When a woman in her early 20s with a massive scar on the side of her face and an eye missing because of injury from fragments of a cluster bomb was asked how her injury affected her life, she said, "*I am sorry to be alive*" (Halimi, 2002, p. 201). Currently landmines and UXO continue to take people's lives.

It is worthwhile examining the cost of landmines to understand the political and economic perspectives. It takes only US \$3-\$30 to produce a land mine but US \$300-\$1000 to remove one (Andersson et al., 1995). The total cost for clearing the mines in Afghanistan will be approximately US \$500 million. In spite of the expense, it is critical that mines be removed to increase agricultural production, reduce agricultural transportation time and costs (Harris, 2002), and decrease human casualties and the health and social costs associated with supporting refugees and displaced persons. Harris estimated that an investment of US \$10 million each year for 10 years would provide five times the benefit in the amount needed (approx \$50.3 million) annually for the next nine years. There is some work in progress, and it should continue until all of the landmines and UXO are removed.

According to the Afghanistan Landmine Report (May. 2008) there were 722 square kilometers (km) of land that needed to be de-mined and so far 310 square km have been achieved by the end of 2007. It has been estimated that it will take up to 2013 to clear the affected areas of land. The international mine action funding to Afghanistan so far has been US \$ 173 million and national input has been US \$ 290,000. This financial support provides training to the workers

and aid to the mine survivors in addition to the mine clearing activities. The reported casualties in 2006 were 811 out of which 98 were killed and in 2007 there were 796 casualties out of which 208 were killed. The estimated mine survivors total up to 52-60,000. The needs for the livelihood of these Afghans are enormous.

It is important to ask certain questions at this point: How can families juggle the costs of replacing an artificial limb—about US \$125—for a growing child every six months? What are the priorities? Should income be spent to feed five other children, or should the money be spent on education, shelter, or clothing? Moreover, the facilities for helping such children to live normal lives are scarce. For a country such as Afghanistan that is recovering from war, the presence of landmines has an impact on not only the environment, but also on the social and economic functioning of the whole family unit.

During an interview on February 27, 2004, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai accurately summarized the effects of the adversities of war in his country:

The war has had a gigantic effect on Afghan children. Tens of thousands of children have suffered heavily from the war. The children have been hit in their basic needs. Their families have suffered, family members have died, houses have been destroyed. Many children have been hurt or become invalids. In addition, the Afghan children had very little basic education during the 20 years of war. This actually concerns more than three generations of children in Afghanistan. (War Child International Network, 2004, ¶ 2)

Yet some do not succumb to the adversities of war such as homelessness, loss of opportunity for education, PTSD, loss of family, malnutrition, infectious diseases, and landmine injury. Even though the Afghan children took refuge in neighboring

countries such as Iran and Pakistan, the adversities accumulate. All these families affected by war were facing similar circumstances, and probably did not have the adequate resources to support each other. With over two decades of war in Afghanistan and the continuous volatile situation in the country, some Afghan refugees have not been able to return home out of fear for their safety or fear of persecution.

### **Definition of Refugee**

In Article 1 of the 1951 U. N. Refugee Convention, the UNHCR (2001) defined *refugee* as

a person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. (p. 6)

According to the UNHCR, Afghan children and their families fit the criteria for refugee status because they left the country of their origin involuntarily in fear of persecution and persistent dangers at home have prevented their return. Other migrant groups leave their country of origin to pursue better economic opportunities. Asylum seekers must also satisfy the UNCHR's definition of refugee, but the difference is that they apply for asylum when they are in the host country, whereas a refugee applies outside his/her country of origin as well as outside the host country. I will discuss the literature on the refugee population and, more specifically, on refugee children in the following section.

### **Literature on Refugees**

According to Westermeyer and Wahmanholm (1996) *child refugees* are defined as those from newborn through 21 years of age. A large body of research has been conducted on the mental health of refugee children; specifically, those suffering from PTSD. In addition, most refugee groups are women and children because the male members have either been incarcerated or killed during the war (Westermeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996). These women and children are vulnerable to all kinds of adversities such as trauma or loss of physical capacity; infectious diseases; malnutrition; loss of family members; lack of educational structure; poor physical environment; having to live with distressed adults; change of family structures and styles that were successful previously, but are now causing problems when they settle in a new culture; harassment and racism in the refuge country; socialization to violence; and learning disabilities caused by language barriers (Berman, 1999; Joshi & O'Donnell, 2003; Lipson & Meleis, 1999; Westermeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996).

Berman (1999) studied two groups of children who were growing up in the midst of violence: (a) 16 refugee children of war, and (b) 16 children of battered women who were living in Canada. Both groups of children showed endurance in spite of having to face different kinds of adversities. In this study the refugee children of war were from Somalia, Liberia, Burundi, and Bosnia; they had settled in Canada and identified the loss of loved friends, family, and culture. Most of these children of war reported struggles with having to adjust to a new

country, school, culture, and language and having to cope with teasing and bullying.

Exposure of children to more than two adverse factors has a cumulative effect, depending on the type and degree of exposure, and therefore they are at risk of developing mental illness (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996). However, not all children exposed to traumatic events will develop PTSD (Joshi & O'Donnell, 2003).

It is evident from the literature review that refugee children face added adversity in fleeing from their country of origin into the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan for safety. Research studies on Afghan refugees who live in the USA show that Afghan women face challenges such as traumatic flight, the loss of family members and property, cultural differences in the country of resettlement, and role changes (Lipson & Miller, 1994). In addition, young and single Afghan women face cultural conflict and the lack of appropriate mates; the middle generation face the challenge of becoming housewives, employees, and mediators between children and spouse; and the elderly feel socially isolated and experience a lack of respect (Lipson & Miller, 1994). Other researchers have identified barriers that refugee Afghan women face, such as economic and occupational problems as well as limited health-care access. These adverse factors negatively affect their health and psychological well-being (Lipson & Omidian, 1997).

Studies on Afghan refugee children who resettle in a new country such as Canada and the USA are scarce. To determine the impact of trauma-related stress among children, researchers have recommended assessing them from the context of child development (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Joshi & O'Donnell, 2003) and from the perspective of the family as a unit (Drummond, Kysela, McDonald, & Query, 2002; McCubbin et al., 1997) or personal characteristics of children (Apfel & Simon, 1996; Garmezy, 1991). Berman (2001) identified a chronological phase of refugee experiences; namely, preflight, flight, and resettlement. In this study of Afghan children what is it that informs us about children's positive adaptation to their environment?

### **Positive Adaptation**

*Resilience*, as discussed in the previous chapter, refers to positive adaptation as an outcome observed in the life of a person in circumstances of past or present adversity that poses significant threat to healthy development (Luthar, et al., 2000; Masten, 2001). Resilience can be viewed from multiple contexts as well as from different perspectives, taking into consideration events in or the context of a person's life. It is important to note that resilience can be judged in the context of an individual, family, or community who face adversity or risk (Riley & Masten, 2005). In addition, the historical contexts of a certain group of people such as Afghans who face the adversities of war offer another perspective. Therefore, presenting a verdict on how well an individual is doing in life requires an appraisal context. A decision on how an individual or a child is doing could

also be made within the context of the expectation of universally accepted developmental milestones for a particular age in a given time and culture (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Riley & Masten, 2005).

In the circumstances of Afghan children who have faced the horrendous trauma of war, survival itself can be considered a criterion of resilience, but only in the short term (Riley & Masten, 2005). Over the long term, if conditions in Afghanistan become more settled or children and family members have had the opportunity to migrate as refugees to peaceful countries such as Canada, one could then look for positive adaptation as an outcome in relation to age-appropriate developmental tasks, academic achievement, emotional health, or physical well-being (Riley & Masten). The criteria for positive adjustment may or may not be appropriate in assessing Afghan refugee children. Researchers have examined the phenomenon of resilience or adaptation from a number of lenses some of which I will discuss below.

### ***Family Models***

McCubbin et al. (1997) analyzed over two decades' worth of research findings on families under stress. They strongly proposed that childhood and adolescent development be examined within the context of family and identified 10 *general resiliency factors* ([GRFs] protective and recovery) and their role in the resiliency process that allow families to "adjust" and maintain functioning in cases where risk factors could contribute to a negative outcome: (a) family problem-solving communication enhances coping strategies and maintains

balance in daily lives; (b) equality facilitates family adjustment and adaptation for both men and women; (c) spirituality facilitates families' coping with crises that have no logical explanations; (d) flexibility allows a sense of control over adverse life events and changes family functioning patterns to maintain harmony; (e) truthfulness enables the family to deal with threatening situations; (f) hope allows the family to re-vitalize the resiliency process by having some expectations of fulfillment of wishes; (g) family hardiness promotes collective strength and commitment to face outcomes; (h) family time and routine creates a sense of stability to enable facing adversity; (i) social support fosters positive changes in times of calamity and affirms the value of family support in facing crisis situations through developing coping strategies and enhancing the self-esteem of all of its members; and (j) health promotes resiliency among family members. McCubbin et al. advocated more observation of these resiliency factors for both measurement and theory building.

In addition to the above GRFs, McCubbin et al. (1997) also identified specific family recovery factors (FRFs) and their associated characteristics that foster the resilience process; they are slightly different, and families may use them to assist in "bouncing back" and adapting when they are faced with crisis situations such as war or separation from family members that could lead to dysfunction. These FRFs include (a) self-reliance and equality, which allow family members to change family functioning according to their emergency needs and to implement action independently on behalf of the family; (b) family



advocacy, which encourages proactive behavior to foster family adaptation; (c) family meaning, which encourages the family to consider new perceptions and to adapt to functioning in times of crisis; and (d) family schema, which allows the family to overcome crisis situations and adapt over time by recollecting their shared beliefs, values, and future expectations as guides.

Drummond et al. (2002) developed a family adaptation model (FAM) that can be used to promote resiliency in families at risk. They identified six protective family patterns (protective processes) and their associated attributes that enable better adjustment in families: (a) commitment to flexibility of the family unit, with interdependence between family members and willingness to change; (b) coherent responses to crises, with acceptance of life situations, a sense of family control, and problem-solving abilities; (c) maintenance of stability, with responsibilities for all family members and effective family structure; (d) effective parenting, with warmth and affection; (e) the presence of support to the family from within the nuclear family, extended family, and a supportive network beyond the family; and (f) responsibilities outside the home in the form of employment and involvement in community and extracurricular activities. In addition, Drummond et al. believed that adverse and protective processes interact. Adverse processes such as infrastructure destruction, environmental danger, ideology, or poverty are considered indicators of risk. Both protective and adverse processes are assessed under five dimensions—namely, demands, appraisals,

coping, supports, and adaptation—that facilitate the type of intervention required for each family.

The above researchers (Drummond et al., 2002; McCubbin et al., 1997) outlined various strategies to facilitate protective processes within the context of the family, whereas Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) developed a model that takes into account children’s internal world as well as external supports such as family, school, and society in the context of healthy development.

### *Developmental Model*

To understand children in situations of war and violence, Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) focused on the context of child development, which includes experiences from biological forces, social interaction, and a favorable environment to meet the challenges of daily life and to promote resilience: “Child development is the process of becoming fully human, whatever that means in a particular child’s culture” (p. 35). War changes the social roles of children; for example, from students to caregivers or soldiers. Children must be given an opportunity to have a positive sense of who they are and the cognitive ability to appreciate the miracle of surviving the war. In addition, their caregivers must recognize the threat of the physical and spiritual trauma of war on child development (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).

To understand the sequential stages of child development Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) examined Erik Erikson’s (1950) four stages:

1. Infancy (birth to 18 months): Infants develop a sense of trust or security from nurturing, especially from the mother. If not, they become mistrustful. For example, children of seriously depressed mothers are less likely than other children to bond with their mothers in the first year (Hipwell, Goossens, Melhuish, & Kumar, 2000).
2. Toddler (18 to 36 months): Toddlers develop their sense of autonomy and learn bodily functions from relationships with parents, siblings, and other important caregivers. If they are not given the appropriate opportunity, they manifest shame through regression in the form of speech problems.
3. Preschool (3 to 5½ years): Preschoolers develop initiative and become confident through language and social skills. If not, they feel guilt and decreased self-worth.
4. Elementary school (5½ to 12 years): These children develop industry by taking on important tasks in the family, in school, and in the community. In addition, this period allows the child to consolidate life experiences to become prepared for challenges in adolescence. However, during war, schools are closed or destroyed, which affects the development of industry and induces an inferiority complex. Moreover, children who experience war have behavior problems and difficulty in concentrating in the classroom (Garbarino et al., 1991).

Looking at children from the context of development allows for the recognition that children have the capacity to function physically and cognitively. Therefore, if the brain is limited and not given the opportunity to develop self-defensive survival efforts during these years, the potential for positive development is hindered and future prospects are lost (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).

According to Kyle (2008) there is an overlap between late school age and adolescence (11-20 years). The adolescent tries to develop an individual sense of identity by trying out many different roles with peers, family, community and society and if it is unsuccessful then role confusion or diffusion occurs. It is a stage of developing one's own values and morals as well feeling invincible leading to risk-taking behaviors and consequently causing conflicts in the family (Kyle).

In addition, within this developmental model it is vital to recognize that children draw "social maps" (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996, p. 38); that is, they form mental pictures of the reality of their world and their place in it. They may perceive themselves in the mother's role, comforting younger siblings during or after the war, or in a receiving role, or in both roles simultaneously. Because children living in war zones very commonly experience fear, some either deal with it or deny it, and the dilemma of denial must be addressed (Garbarino & Kostelny). It is important that parents and other adults provide a calm loving environment.

Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) also embraced Vygotsky's approach to child development, which is called the "zone of proximal development" (p. 41). This zone of proximal development posits that children learn with the guidance of competent adults rather than completely on their own, and they incorporated it within the model that they called "adults as teachers" (p. 41). Therefore, living in a war-torn country such as Afghanistan, to avoid being affected psychologically, children need to be taught "how to redefine the world in moral and structural terms" (p. 41) and what is acceptable within their culture. However, maintaining the role of teacher is not an easy task when parents and family members themselves face so many adversities all at one time. Garbarino and Kostelny also took into consideration the accumulation of risk in times of war.

After observing children coping with war and communal violence, Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) concluded that children can cope with one or two risk factors that confront them, but when the number of risk factors increases to three, four, or five, there is potential danger to their development. Therefore, understanding the experiences of war from the context of the number of risks is vital. Such children as those described in the section on the adversities of war in this chapter face multiple risks, such as the infrastructure destruction of homes, schools, and hospitals; poverty; unemployment; diseases; hunger and starvation.

### ***Protective Factors***

Understanding the phenomenon of resilience also requires identifying protective factors that help children to bounce back from traumatic events. In this

section I examine research on protective factors. Based on an extensive literature review, Garmezy (1991), one of the pioneer researchers on resilience, speculated that protective factors may “enable individuals to circumvent life stressors” (p. 416). These may operate across a variety of contexts. He classified the protective factors into three major categories: (a) individual traits or attributes, such as a good or positive temperament, cognitive skills, an optimistic view of self, and positive responsiveness to others; (b) family qualities and support, such as warmth, cohesion, expectations, and the presence of a caring adult (such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle), either in the absence of parents or in the presence of marital problems; and (c) external support systems or community support, which entails social networks and the presence of institutional structures such as schools, a caring agency, or a church or religious affiliation. Several other researchers have repeatedly identified some of these specific protective factors for the individual, family, and community (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner, 1989, 1993).

Similarly, Apfel and Simon (1966) identified specific protective factors that help children to overcome the adversities of war; they are mostly personal characteristics, such as (a) being resourceful and therefore able to extort loving care from the adults in the environment; (b) being curious and acquiring knowledge about the crisis, which increases the chances of survival; (c) being helpful to oneself and others; (d) having a strong belief in one’s right to survive

and a vision to restore order and therefore being able to invoke positive images; and (e) being witty and evoking humor even in the most harsh situations.

The above summary of the literature on resilience in children and the protective factors informs this study. However, the bulk of this literature is from a western perspective. There are perhaps other protective factors that contribute to the development and enhancement of resilience. Therefore, I expanded my literature to; (a) absolute faith in Allah (God), (b) family support including *tarbia* (upbringing); and (d) strong community support (Kanji, Drummond, & Cameron, 2007).

***Absolute faith in Allah (God).*** According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2000c) faith is defined as accepting and trusting God's will. A Somali refugee woman stresses that faith in Allah (God) not only gives courage to individuals to face adversities of surviving as refugees but also instills hope for a better future (McMichael, 2002). Some families never moved out of Afghanistan because they had faith that nothing would happen to them and they remained unharmed (Kanji et al., 2007). This total trust in God at all times seems to provide inner peace. Moreover, this spirituality of complete faith in Allah and hopefulness for better days ahead also promotes family and community support.

***Family support.*** Berry et al. (2003) explained the importance of family to Afghans. As a woman in a discussion group stated, "a family is like a strong chain, every member is linked to each other" (p. 14). These researchers also offered a glimpse into how Afghan children view their family: "Losing a family

member is like this—it is like you are on a river in a ship and then the driver of the ship dies and you are left in the big river unable to drive the ship” (p. 32); and there is a saying, “A mother and father are irreplaceable fruit” (p. 35).

In addition to the importance of being part of a family, Afghan children also consider the extended family unit as precious. This unit includes parents and their children, married sons and their families, including grandparents. “If there is a grandparent in the family, he/she takes the responsibility for *tarbia* (upbringing) to instill and teach values that promote positive individual traits in children” (Kanji et al., 2007). This task has been a challenge to Afghan families because of the constant war that has disrupted the family unit for various reasons. However, *tarbia* also seems a moral quality and a strong protective process that fosters resilience. For example, a child with good *tarbia* will have respect for parents, all elders, use clean language when addressing individuals and be hospitable (Berry et al., 2003).

A grandmother described *tarbia* as follows: “*Tarbia* is everything—the people who get on well with their life have good *tarbia* and the people who don’t get on well with their life don’t have good *tarbia*, and all this comes from the family” (Berry et al., 2003, p. 8). In the fathers’ group discussion, one man believed that “giving *tarbia* lasts all the days of a person’s life. After a while they know their left from right hand but they still need the support of families” (p. 14). *Tarbia* also instills a sense of hospitality in Afghans which is inculcated from childhood, so that it becomes an integral and positive part of daily life and



therefore never considered a burdensome obligation. They support each other in every way possible, and that is probably how each member receives the strength to cope with adversity. *Tarbia* further facilitates building networks with the wider community for individuals and families.

***Community support.*** Community support is found outside the family; for example, in an adult or a peer or even an institutional structure such as a school (Garmezzy, 1991). As an example of community support, in her discussion group a mother explained:

If a person is blind, we help them across the street; if a person is deaf, we try to make them understand, and if someone is poor, we try to assist them. So, it is the same with all the children—we help them. (Berry et al., 2003, p. 52)

A grandfather discussed community support as follows:

During the war years we had to leave our homes early in the morning and we passed long distances by foot and we couldn't return for a long time and we got very bad memories. But some friends and relatives helped us by giving us money, clothes and food because they were our friends and they had sympathy for us and they helped us a lot. (Berry et al., 2003, p. 53)

During the political upheaval someone in the community was always on the lookout for areas that might be bombed, and the elder in the family would decide where the family should gather for safety. There is a strong bond with the larger community as well, which is very apparent during weddings and festival celebrations. This sense of belonging and cohesion within Afghan families and the larger community acts as a protective process and mitigates the compounding adversities of war.

The effect of war on Afghan children either through direct (self) or vicarious experiences (family members) may not be fully contained in the above cited literature on resilience and allied concepts. Therefore an exploratory study is timely as war rages on in Afghanistan and generates more generations of refugees.

I share what Jason Elliot (1999) writes about his travels in Afghanistan living for a time with Afghan families and foreign aid workers. In a discussion about the Afghan people one night, a colleague stated that the Afghans are “un people qui reste debout—a people who stay standing upright” (p. 441). He also speaks of the closeness to the elements of life itself through coping in such harsh living conditions. Perhaps travel writers such as Elliot, through knowledge and insights gained from living with the people, show us the way to conduct research with other cultures; with sufficient time, and being present in the country and with respect.

### **Summary**

It is important to note that Afghan children and their family members have been facing the adversities of war for almost three decades. The major adversity is war itself, followed by forced migration, homelessness, loss of opportunity for education, PTSD, loss of family members, malnutrition, infectious diseases, landmine and UXO injury, poor physical environment, and having to live with distressed adults. Enduring all of these adversities could crush any human being.

The list of adversities continues to accumulate even when Afghans settle in a country of refuge or in a new country such as Canada or the USA: harassment, racism, socialization to violence, and learning disabilities caused by language barriers. Children face more adversities when family members are unemployed, which impacts the financial resources and access to health care. Even if Afghan children are away from the war-torn area of Afghanistan, further political problems may trigger memories of the experiences of war, and therefore they may never be completely at peace. To survive the adversities, it is important that Afghan children, whether living in Afghanistan or living in another country as refugees, have access to reliable protective factors that facilitate bouncing back, adapting, and maintaining their well-being.

### CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIBING THE METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter described the literature that helped to inform the study and research questions. In this chapter I discuss hermeneutic photography according to Hagedorn (1994) as both a research method as well as a methodological approach based in Gadamerian hermeneutics. Hermeneutic photography as a research method, technique, or tool, facilitates access to difficult and life threatening human experiences. As a methodological approach based in hermeneutic inquiry, it assists in understanding the meaning and impact of these experiences (Hagedorn). In keeping with Gadamerian hermeneutics I endeavored to consistently keep in mind the importance of uncovering pre-understanding or prejudice while I worked to gain an understanding through dialogue with the participants and the text to address the research questions in this study.

The above approach is well suited to give voice to every Afghan refugee child in this research study and to address the research questions: *What are the experiences of Afghan refugee children currently living Canada in the aftermath of war? How do Afghan refugee children describe their experiences of day-to-day life?* In addition, I describe the analysis, the procedures to protect the study participants, and the achievement of rigor of the study. Finally, the unfolding of the data, the methods of data collection, the research participants, and the process to obtain this data analysis are also described. Because hermeneutic photography is grounded in interpretive and hermeneutic inquiry, I also include below a description of these methodological ways.

Before I elaborate on Gadamer's (1960/1989) philosophy, I define the terms *methodology* and *method*. Methodology refers to a philosophical framework and its specific assumptions that guide a researcher in following a particular approach, whereas method refers to the research technique and the procedure for carrying out the research (van Manen, 1990).

### **Contextualizing the Methodological Approach**

In this section I discuss Gadamer's (1960/1989) *hermeneutic* philosophy. I also identify my preunderstanding of the topic to gain an understanding of the experiences of Afghan children in the aftermath of war and thereby transcend my horizon of understanding through dialogue with the research participants (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003; Gadamer, 1960/1989). Therefore, in this study *hermeneutic photography*, which is based on the methodology of hermeneutic (interpretive) inquiry, is used to explore the experiences of Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada. Before discussing the research methodology of hermeneutic photography, in the next section I first discuss the tradition of interpretive inquiry.

### ***Interpretive Inquiry***

To *interpret* is to explain the meaning of someone's remarks or a conversation between two persons, verbally, by means of art or criticism (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000d). The term *hermeneutic* comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, which means "to interpret," and Hermes was the god of Greek legend who acted as a messenger for

other gods and translated the meanings of the messages for humans (Polkinghorne, 1983). According to Max Weber (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1983), physical movements are considered ordinary perceptions, whereas understanding, or *verstehen*, facilitates grasping the meaning of human experience or action and is more complex.

Interpretive methodologies such as hermeneutics and phenomenology belong to the discipline of psychology and philosophy and are very closely related, but not one and the same (Fleming et al., 2003). Phenomenological and hermeneutic methodologies “supplement each other, the first focusing beneath the surface of individual events in order to describe patterns, the second focusing on the linguistic and non-linguistic actions in order to penetrate the meaning of events” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 214). Van Manen (1990) combined both phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition into one research methodology. *Phenomenological* methodology describes the lived experience as it appears, whereas *hermeneutic* methodology interprets it (van Manen). Van Manen stressed that the “(phenomenological) ‘facts’ of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the ‘facts’ of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process” (pp. 180-181). Therefore, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach allows the researcher to understand the meaning of the description of lived experience written in text from the perspective of the individuals under study (van Manen, 1990).

Both approaches have evolved from several philosophies that focus on the “lifeworld” or human experience as it is lived (Forbes et al., 1999; Polkinghorne, 1983). Many philosophers, such as Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, strongly believed that the methodology of the empirical tradition or natural sciences did not allow an adequate study of human phenomena.

The new philosophy of science, referred to as *human science*, that arose from the antipositivist position in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was foundational to the philosophical development of phenomenology and hermeneutics because it challenged the view of acceptable knowledge. Therefore, I present an overview of the above-mentioned selected philosophers who contributed to the development of phenomenology and hermeneutics. My purpose is not to present a complete historical development of each philosophical movement, but rather to clarify each philosopher’s standpoint that influenced the methodological considerations and how they are connected in their views.

According to Polkinghorne (1983), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 -1911) was the principal engineer of the differentiation between research in natural science and research in human science. Dilthey agreed with the positivist position that rigorous scientific knowledge is necessary for natural phenomenon, but he questioned whether empirical research is appropriate to study human phenomena. Dilthey strongly believed that human life is experienced through personal histories, complex social realities, activities within the environment and with

other humans, and practical reflections upon daily living, which are objectified in language, belief, and arts. He preferred an intersubjective, verifiable human science knowledge that facilitates social and political decisions. Therefore, he stressed the importance of understanding humans within the context of their lifeworld or human experience as they live it (Gadamer, 1960/1989).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher, is known as the father of the phenomenological movement. He believed that experience perceived by human consciousness has value and studied it scientifically “as a pure ‘region’ that could be considered in a way essentially separate from the ‘facts’ of the empirical realm” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 42). It was Husserl who made us aware that we take for granted the world in which we live every day pre-reflectively; this is the notion of “lifeworld” (van Manen, 1990, p. 182).

Heidegger (1889-1976), who was Husserl’s student and carried on his work, proposed that consciousness is ingrained historically in the life experiences of how human beings such as father, mother, and child exist or act by “being-in-the-world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 175). Therefore, *ontology*, the study of various ways of a human being’s “being in the world,” is Heidegger’s phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Meaning is found in the interaction and connection between an individual or a “being” and a situation in the “lifeworld,” which is normally taken for granted (Heidegger, 1962).

Merleau-Ponty (1964) extended Heidegger’s work and emphasized the relationship of the structures of lived experience to the perception of the body. He



described the existence of human-embodied conditions relating to time, space, body, and human relations by being present in the world.

Schleiermacher (1768-1834) contributed to the development of two types of hermeneutics: grammatical and psychological interpretation. *Grammatical* refers to language, and the meaning of every word is to be determined; and *psychological* is related to the total picture of the text and the author's views (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Ricoeur (1981) identified *hermeneutics* as the philosophy of the interpretation of texts. In addition, *hermeneutics* is also an activity that assists the interpreter in recognizing the universal message that is hidden in the text and constructed on the basis of phenomenology.

Gadamer (1960/1989), a 20<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, reexamined Heidegger's description of the hermeneutic circle of going back and forth through dialogue (text) by exploring the parts and the whole and never allowing our preunderstanding (foreconception) to influence the topic of the study (Gadamer, 1960/1989). For Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, this preunderstanding or prejudice had a positive connotation: "We are all part of history and it is thus impossible to step out of history to look at the past objectively" (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 115).

Gadamer (1960/1989) looked at all of the conditions under which human understanding takes place and how dialogue produces understanding. Gadamer explored the hermeneutic circle of communicating back and forth for clarification

(How, 2003). Therefore, it is important to recognize preunderstanding in order not to misjudge meaning in the text (Fleming et al., 2003). The notion of identifying and bringing forward the preunderstanding or prejudice during a hermeneutic conversation is discussed later in the chapter. All of these philosophers have played a significant role in the development of interpretive methodology to focus on the study of human experiences, which are connected with the lifeworld. I now discuss hermeneutic photography as a methodology.

### ***Hermeneutic Photography***

Contemporary research into the history of art gives us ample evidence that what we call “a picture” has a varied history (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 135). Hermeneutic photography is a research methodology that is derived from hermeneutic philosophy and allows researchers to access unique or unknown aspects of human experience (Hagedorn, 1994). Photographs have been used in the past as evidence in reporting events, in record keeping, and for leading interviews (Collier J. & Collier, 1986). Visual images from photographs allow people to reflect and interpret symbolic life moments or events in a new way. Subsequently, photographs facilitate the research participants’ composition of an interpretive text that discloses the phenomenon of interest meaningfully (Hagedorn, 1994; Wang & Burris, 1994; Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001). In this study the use of photographs facilitated the Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada to reveal their experiences of living in the aftermath of war.

Various researchers have used hermeneutic photography for different reasons. Nelson (1996) used it in a study with nine women as a method to describe and interpret for the purpose of understanding the experience of the uncertainty of living with breast cancer. Berman et al. (2001) used this method with Bosnian refugee children to explore how they faced life after leaving their homeland and their everyday struggles and challenges of living in Canada. Radley and Taylor (2003) used photographs taken by patients to show the physical setting of a ward and how it plays a role in their recovery. The use of hermeneutic photography in my study helped the Afghan children identify who or/and what was important to them and facilitated them to explore the experience of everyday life that they face in the aftermath of war including issues, challenges, and tensions. In addition, it assisted them to identify strategies to cope with adversities to maintain positive adjustment or adaptation in their daily lives.

Photographs used during the dialogue act as reference points in time to augment discussion and enlarge the range of data beyond visual images by providing new insights in the form of rich texts for interpretation of unique experiences (Berman et al., 2001; Collier & Collier, 1986; Hagedorn, 1994; Nelson, 1996). With photography, the participants normally use the camera to capture the specific images of experience that are then used to enhance discourse during hermeneutic conversation. Hermeneutic photography is a “unique methodological approach for investigating various human experiences” (Hagedorn, 1994, p. 47). Similarly, the Afghan refugee children in this study were

asked to take photographs to capture symbols that represented their experiences of important events or things or people in their lives (Berman et al., 2001). These images were then used to enhance discourse and convey meaning during *photo conversations*.

Researchers have used different terms to refer to hermeneutic photography, such as *photo novella* (Berman et al., 2001; LeClerc, Wells, Craig, & Wilson, 2002; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang et al., 1994) and *photo voice* (LeClerc et al., 2002; Strack et al., 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997). This specific act of using photographs as a medium for interviewing is called *phototalk* (Berman et al., 2001); I have called it *photo conversation*. All of these terms are used interchangeably. This technique of hermeneutic photography is also considered participatory action research (PAR) for the purpose of eliciting, revealing, or evoking responses that may represent critical self-reflection of perceptions, an understanding of the experiences, and self-awareness in a changing world (Riley & Manias, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997). Therefore, using photographs during hermeneutic conversation or inquiry with Afghan refugee children provided another viewpoint and expanded each individual's reflective insight into the *experiences of day-to day life in the aftermath of war specifically in the transitional country of Pakistan and in the settlement country of Canada*.

Some researchers (LeClerc et al., 2002; Wang et al., 1994) have also used photo voice to inform or influence policy makers. Wang et al. (1994) used photo novella among rural Chinese women to assess the development of a program to

improve their reproductive health. Their aim was to promote multisectoral discourse on reproductive health and to pressure policy makers to address the societal and economical issues that emerged from the discussion of the photographs. Through collective educational empowerment and the use of *photo novella*, these Chinese women were able to voice their lived experiences and concerns to the policy makers. Wang and Burris (1994) identified a photograph of a woman weeding her cornfield while her baby is lying alone at the side (p. 181). The photographs in this study provided “a lightning rod” (p. 180) of visual evidence; and the voicing allowed the women to share their concerns regarding child health, child rearing, and family planning and encouraged the “women’s discussion of their burdens and needs” (p. 180). Similarly, LeClerc et al. (2002) used photo novella to inform hospital discharge planners and policy decision makers of the everyday challenges and needs of elderly women in their homes six to eight weeks following hospital discharge.

Strack et al. (2004) tested the effectiveness of the photo-voice method among youth between the ages of 11 and 17 from a low-income urban neighborhood. In addition, the objective was to revise a youth photo-voice curriculum and empower them to actively participate in identifying their needs within their community. Training was provided to the youths twice a week for 12 weeks to enable them to become photo-voice participants, and a plan was devised to offer them a venue to exhibit their photos and communicate their needs to the policy makers. They were also given a notebook to document the reasons that the

pictures were taken. Overall, the photo-voice program was successful in involving these youth, who were then able to inform the policy makers and the community members of their concerns. For example, a 12-year-old took a picture of the “crumbling classroom ceiling” (p. 53) in his middle school. Moreover, the youth enjoyed the photo-voice project and were able to analyze positive and negative issues in their community.

Collier and Collier (1986) noted that, from their experience, photographs facilitate gaining entry for interviews, allow the participants to express their views openly, and enable the researcher to lead the inquiry process spontaneously without a great deal of probing. Berman et al. (2001) evaluated the merits of photo novella with Bosnian refugee children in Canada to explore the everyday challenges that they face and found that the dialogic interview using the photographs rarely required probes. Moreover, with this group of children the photographs stimulated spontaneous sharing of their lives in Bosnia, the adversities that they faced, and their visions for the future.

Similarly, during the *photo conversations* in this study, the Afghan children used the photographs that they had taken as tools to empower them to reflect on their experiences of living in the transitional country of Pakistan as well as in the settlement country of Canada. The photographs sharpened their visual senses and added a new dimension to nursing knowledge (Berman et al., 2001) of their experiences in the aftermath of war. I gave the research participants notebooks to allow them to record their reflections on each picture (Strack et al.,

2004). Moreover, the knowledge of the complex cultural, economical, and educational issues that emerged from the discussion of the photographs will be useful to inform the community and appropriate institutions to increase awareness of the needs of Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada.

Although hermeneutic photography is time consuming because of the vast amount of complex data (Wang & Burris, 1997), the power of these “portraits of participation” are in the hands of the “people who experience powerlessness as their dominant social reality” (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 185). Hence, it is a significant investment for the future. Using hermeneutic photography allowed the Afghan refugee children to communicate critical and rich information about their families and their life in Pakistan and Canada.

To summarize, there are three distinctive reasons for using the hermeneutic photography approach in this study. First, Afghan refugee children could use the camera as a tool to take photographs of their choice and then interpret them during the *photo conversation*. However, most of the children opted to use the photographs they already had with them at home. Second, photographs represented as symbols allowed critical reflections of personal experience beyond the picture itself. Third, the hermeneutic analysis of photographs facilitated the illumination of a deep understanding of who and what was important to them, their day-to-day life experiences as well as their needs in the aftermath of war.

The challenging experiences that the Afghan refugee children conveyed during the *photo conversations* revealed their experiences in the aftermath of war. I used Gadamer's (1960/1989) hermeneutic philosophy during the *photo conversation* as well as through dialogue with the text, to allow me to bring forth and confirm my preunderstanding accrued during my work experience in Afghanistan.

### ***Gadamer's Hermeneutic Philosophy***

According to Gadamer (1960/1989), philosophical hermeneutics is the ability to understand a topic in which the inquirer (researcher) is required to be connected to the topic from the very beginning of the inquiry. The topic of the hermeneutic inquiry begins by addressing historical context, traditions, practices, and understandings prior to the inquiry in an attempt to retrieve past meanings, acknowledge the familiarities, and create new or different understanding of the topic in the current situation. This connection of the researcher and the topic is considered indispensable in gaining an understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Gadamer claimed that:

application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application did not consist in relating some pre-given universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditional text tries to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he first understands it per-se, and then afterwards uses it for particular application. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text—i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the text's meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutic situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all. (p. 324)



Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the Afghan children in the aftermath of war in this research study, Gadamer's (1960/1989) key philosophical hermeneutic concepts of the hermeneutic circle, dialogue, the fusion of horizons, and prejudice as metaphors of understanding (Fleming et al., 2003; Geanellos, 1998a; Geanellos, 1998b; Koch, 1996) were used. In addition hermeneutic photography served as a basis for a dialogue or *photo conversation* with the Afghan children. Each of the above concepts embedded in Gadamer's philosophical inquiry are described in the following paragraphs.

***The hermeneutic circle.*** The hermeneutic circle is a metaphor taken from Heidegger (Gadamer, 1960/1989), to understand the descriptions of research participants' experiences by moving dialectically between the parts and the whole into larger contexts. Gadamer strongly emphasized language as well as history and identified the position of the researcher within the hermeneutic circle (Koch, 1996). In addition, the circle is ontologically significant, which is made possible by revising the projected preunderstanding of the researcher through a dialogical reciprocal relationship to understand the mode of being different (Gadamer, 1960/1989; Koch, 1996).

***Dialogue.*** The metaphor of dialogue is the question and answer (Koch, 1966). Gadamer (1960/1989) claimed:

The art of questioning is the art of questioning even further—i.e., the art of thinking. It is called dialectic because it is the art of conducting a real dialogue. To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. Hence it necessarily has the structure of question and answer. The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us. . . dialectic consists not in trying to discover

the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing. (pp. 166-167)

Therefore, within the hermeneutical circle the dialogue was kept open through question and answer so that the Afghan refugee children were able to converse in whichever way they wished with the aid of photographs. The appropriate question and the open approach allowed the research participants to respond and take me with them through their experiences. I used the main question; “Tell me why this picture or photograph is important to you? I also used the questioning probes to maintain the focus on their experiences such as “Can you tell me more about your experiences in Pakistan or Canada?” The probes depended on the course of the conversation and I let the children control the flow of the conversation (Koch, 1996).

*Fusion of horizons.* Another metaphor for understanding is the notion of the fusion of horizons, at which point interpretation takes place between the researcher and the participant (Koch, 1996). Gadamer (1960/1989) defined *horizon* as “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (p. 302); it is continually developing. Therefore, the horizon could be narrow, expanded, or constantly changing, but never completely closed.

The fusion of horizons occurs when the different vantage points of the researcher and the participant come together through language during the dialogue or conversation or through dialogue with the text. The fusion of horizons in research writing result into a new understanding (Fleming et al., 2003; Koch,

1996; Spence, 2001). In this study I have shown how the fusion of horizons occurred during *photo conversation* between the children and me; and the text and me to create a new meaning. I also identified the preunderstanding or prejudices (value positions) of the topic before starting photo conversations with the children; reflected on them; and then moved beyond to a new horizon of understanding (Fleming et al., 2003; Geanellos, 1998a; Koch, 1996).

***Prejudice.*** Because we are all part of history and live within a certain tradition, we are bound to carry certain historical baggage of prejudices that are brought into consciousness (Fleming et al., 2003). Preunderstanding consists of background experiences or practices from the world or from written text that carry with them a point of view from which the interpretations are made; they also create expectations about what might be anticipatory to the interpretations (Fleming et al., 2003; Geanellos, 1998a; Geanellos, 1998b).

According to Gadamer (1960/1989), prejudice is considered positive and allows access to the world. Interpretation and understanding occur especially when prejudices or preunderstandings are brought forward or to consciousness and the event occurs in language through dialogue with others and with oneself (Gadamer, 1960/1989). Therefore, the preunderstandings were brought into the discussions with the Afghan refugee children and addressed before the dialogue could move on (Cameron, 2004). However, we have to “remain open to the meaning of the other person or text” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 268). This openness facilitated situating the meaning conveyed by the Afghan refugee

children in our whole meaning or relation to it. “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own foremeanings” (p. 269). Gadamer was merely concerned about prejudices being considered as preconditions for understanding.

Consequently, before entering the hermeneutic circle, I identified my pre-understanding of the experiences of Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada in the aftermath of war. My preunderstanding was from my experiential knowledge while working in Afghanistan as well as from a review of the literature (Kanji et al., 2005). I may not have a complete list because new preunderstandings continue to form. Addressing the preunderstanding mitigated the pitfall of confirming my own beliefs and biases about the experiences of the Afghan children (Geanellos, 1998b). Instead I worked together with the Afghan refugee children through *photo conversation* or dialogue to reach a shared understanding of their experiences in the transitional country of Pakistan and in the final settlement country in Canada. The back and forth dialogue with the Afghan children allowed me to achieve a deep understanding of their day-to-day life experiences. Each statement below reflects my pre-understandings related to the topic of research.

1. Nurses care and are in a position to listen to the experiences of refugee children in the aftermath of war in order to understand them and act in their behalf.

2. The experiences in the aftermath of war constitute a concern to Afghan refugee children and their family members. There is literature on the effects of the aftermath of war on children and family members, and it is anticipated that each individual may have some concerns that are common, but there will also be some concerns or experiences that are related to individual context.
3. Understanding the meaning of the phenomenon of interest requires a conversation with the Afghan refugee children and a commitment to remain open to the meaning conveyed through language. It is expected that through dialogue and language, the children and I as the nurse researcher will be able to reflect and create meaning about their experiences of the day-to-day life or struggles in the aftermath of war. In addition, Afghan refugee children will identify strategies used to overcome adversity in the country of refuge as well as in the current country of settlement.
4. The day- to- day life experiences in the aftermath of war can affect refugee children physically as well as emotionally, and it can affect their lives and their family members negatively or positively. I have a great deal to learn from this experience.
5. As a nurse researcher it is my social responsibility not only to understand the day-to-day struggles of Afghan children in the aftermath of war but also to comprehend the phenomenon of resilience

from the point of view of my research participants; their history, their culture, and their experiences. Secondly, it is important to bring awareness in different forums about the resources needed to build resilience and enhance health and well-being in this population.

The dialogue that was initiated regarding these prejudices uncovered new understandings during the dialogue with the Afghan refugee children and confirmed the appropriateness or inappropriateness of some of these beginning understandings. The new understandings allowed entry points for questioning the children and the text to gain appropriate answers to the research questions. In this study I used *photo conversation* to address and confirm my pre-understandings with the Afghan refugee children. My pre-understanding merged with the understanding of the Afghan refugee children and with their responses to the probing questions and we reached another level of horizon and a new shared meaning of the phenomenon of interest (Gadamer, 1960/1989). In the following chapters, where appropriate to the analysis I have included an etymological description of some words. As interpretive inquiry and hermeneutic inquiry is a textual analysis of language, understanding word origins are necessary and appropriate (van Manen, 1990).

In summary, hermeneutic photography as a method facilitated the expansion of data by adding depth to the content. Photographs are visual text and grasp symbols that reflect experiences, which are later communicated during dialogic hermeneutic inquiry to convey the meaningful signs contained within

them. Both approaches—hermeneutic photography, and hermeneutic inquiry—offered a research perspective that assisted me to participate in a conversation with the children and later I sought to understand the experiences of Afghan refugee children currently living in Canada in the aftermath of war and what was important to them.

### **Study Setting/Context**

I conducted this study in Canada, in the province of Alberta. I recruited the research participants from the city of Edmonton, which has a large population of Afghan refugees. The study was approved at the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the University of Alberta. As stated earlier in the Prologue and Chapter One there were some modification to my study protocol and therefore below, I refer at times to this.

### **The Participants**

In qualitative studies the actual number of participants required is still debated and a fixed number is unknown (Morse, 2000; Sandelowski, 1995). I recruited seven Afghan refugee children to participate in this study. Each of them had 10-15 pictures, which meant there were approximately 70-105 pictures. For this study the two to three photographic conversations with the Afghan refugee children resulted in a large data set for each participant.

### ***Description of Participants***

In interpretive inquiry the focus is on understanding the experiences of the participants rather than generalizing the findings to a specific population.

Therefore a detailed account of the demographic characteristics of each participant is not applicable. To ensure the anonymity of the participants I provide a general description of the participants with pseudonyms. In addition, the description of the participants provides a context for understanding the analysis and discussion as well as shows diversity (if any) in the children. There were seven participants recruited for this study between the ages of 13 to 17 years with an average age of 15 years. Five children were females (Gulshan age 17, Izzat age 17, Tayreez age 15, Sonu age 14, Meera age 13), and 2 were males (Azim age 15, Farooq age 13). All the participants were born in Afghanistan and had two parent families. They were all Muslims belonging to the Shia sect namely the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims also known as the Ismailis. The description of the Ismaili and its community follows after the section on initial recruitment. I will further comment on this below.

### ***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria***

The inclusion of participants in this study was purposefully determined. Each research participant (a) was born in Afghanistan, (b) either a male or a female, (c) entered Canada through Pakistan, (d) resided in Canada for at least two years, (e) had some command of the English language, (f) was between the ages of 13-17 at the time of recruitment, and (g) permitted me to audiotape the interview. In addition, children who were attending psychiatric counseling or therapy at the time of interview were excluded from the study.



### ***Initial Recruitment and Gaining Access to Participants***

I connected with the individuals in the three agencies or places that had given me the support letters and agreed to facilitate recruitment of study participants before undergoing the ethical review process (Appendix A): (a) His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili, Council of Edmonton; (b) Mennonite Center for Newcomers; and, (c) Multi-Cultural Health Brokers Co-op. After I received approval from the HREB at U of A (Appendix B), I presented a summary of the study proposal to the first two agencies. Only the first agency facilitated recruitment of participants. The Mennonite Center for Newcomers could not facilitate recruiting the participants as none of the Afghan refugees that used their services fitted into the inclusion criteria. The person in the third agency, who gave the support letter, was away on sick leave. When she returned, I contacted her to discuss the changes in the recruitment of the participants according to HREB requirements. She informed me that she could not facilitate the recruitment of the participants according to these very specific requirements of HREB.

The connector made the initial telephone or face-to-face contact with the parents and/or head of the family of Afghan refugee children to request consent for his/her child to participate in the research study (Appendix C). The consent forms were also translated into Farsi for parents or heads of the families who did

not understand English (translated Farsi copy<sup>2</sup> attached with English version). Once the first connectors gave the name and telephone number of the interested participants to me, I contacted them and their parents by telephone to arrange a time and an appropriate meeting place. I explained the nature of the study in more detail and answered any questions. The parents and/or head of the family (Appendix D1 and D2) as well as the research participants (Appendix E) were requested to sign the forms. Only three participants and their parents signed the consent form. The remaining four participants gave verbal tape-recorded consent and their parents gave verbal consent (Appendix F). The parents did not want to sign or have their consent audio-taped, however they were very clear with me that they agreed to this study and the conversation with their child.<sup>3</sup> I recorded the circumstances of the consent as well as who was present, and the reason for them not wishing to sign in my researcher diary and we proceeded with the conversation.

I gave each of them a copy of the consent form. I also distributed the disposable cameras at the first meeting. More detail of the photography process is discussed later and this process below.

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<sup>2</sup> The original title of my study, “Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation with Afghan Refugee Children,” remains in the translated version.

<sup>3</sup> As discussed at Article 2.1 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: “Where oral consent is appropriate, the researcher may wish to make a contemporaneous journal entry of the event and circumstances” (p. 2.2). Further, Item 66.9.2 of the GFC Policy Manual states, “Evidence of free and informed consent by the participant or authorized third party should ordinarily be obtained in writing. Where written consent is culturally unacceptable, or where there are good reasons for not recording consent in writing, researchers shall document the procedures used to seek and obtain free and informed consent” (Written communication from the HREB Charmaine Kabatoff via Dr Glenn Greiner Chair of HREB Panel B, March 3, 2009).

The informed consent form provided (a) a description of the purpose of the study and the nature of the unstructured *photo conversations* (two to three), which included a discussion of the photographs of their choice from those that the Afghan refugee would take at the beginning of the study as well as those (family or others) that they already have at home, (b) a request for consent to audiotape the interviews, (c) information on the length of time required for each interview—approximately one to one and a half hours, (d) a description of the method for the confidential handling of the dialogic interview data, (e) the benefits of sharing the experience, and (f) the risk of evoking an emotional response during the interview. The form also informed the participants that they had the right to terminate their participation in the study at any time without consequences.

Only His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council of Edmonton facilitated the recruitment of the participants. Therefore all the children in the study are from the Ismaili community.

### **Introduction to the Ismaili Community**

The Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, who are generally known as *Ismailis* (and hereinafter referred to as Ismailis) belong to the Shia branch of Islam. There are two main branches of Islam, the Shia and the Sunni (majority of Muslims). While there is a rich diversity of interpretations within Islam, all Muslims (including Ismailis) adhere to a core set of unifying doctrines. This includes the *Shahada*, the fundamental Islamic testimony of truth, “that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) is His Messenger”

(The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), 2008, ¶ 2.). In addition, they believe that (a) Prophet Muhammad was the final messenger of Allah, and (b) the Holy Quran, Allah's final message to mankind was revealed through him. Muslims also hold that besides Prophet Muhammad, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were also Prophets of Allah (IIS, 2008).

Similar to the other Shia Muslims, the Ismailis affirm that Hazrat Ali was designated by Prophet Muhammed to be his successor and the first hereditary Imam (spiritual leader) of the Ummah (Muslim community) after him. The spiritual leadership through Ali is also known as the Imamah. According to the Shia doctrine and tradition, succession to Imamah is by way of *Nass* (Designation) among the descendants of Ali and his wife Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. This *nass* is "the absolute prerogative of the Imam of the Time to appoint his successor from amongst any of his male descendants" (IIS, 2008, ¶ 3).

According to the Sunni doctrine, the Prophet's religious authority came to an end at the time of his death and he did not appoint any successor after him. Therefore, Abu Bakr was elected as the first Caliph (the head of state) by the faithful and companions of the Prophet (Aga Khan III, 1954). For the Sunni Muslims, since it was impossible to constitute a religious authority, the interpretation of Quran, the examples and the sayings (Hadith) of the Prophet (collectively known as Sunnah) was left to the faithful (Aga Khan III, 1954).

From the brief description above of the Shia and the Sunni doctrine, I move on to inform further about the Ismailis and their religious beliefs. The Ismailis form the second largest community of the Shia branch of Islam. Currently the Ismaili community (Jamat) of approximately 15 million resides in over 25 countries, mainly in Asia (Central and South), Africa, Europe, America and Australia (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008). The Ismailis believe that there will always be a legitimate Imam, who is proof of God existing on earth (Daftary, 2004) and that he has “the Legitimate Authority for the interpretation of the faith” (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008, p. 127).

The Ismailis give allegiance to the Imam of the time and presently His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan is the 49th hereditary Imam. According to the “Muslim ethical tradition, which links spirit and matter,” the Imam’s responsibility is to interpret the faith as well as “improve the quality of life of his community and of the wider societies within which that community lives” (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008, p. 95). This continuous guidance has “engendered in the Ismaili Community an ethos of self-reliance, unity, and a common identity” (IIS, 2008, ¶ 5).

The Ismailis have a structure of Councils for the social governance of the Ismaili community comprising of Territorial, National, Regional and Local Councils. In the Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims (1998) article 5 states that:

The aims and objectives of the Councils in relation to their respective areas of jurisdiction shall be the social governance, administration,

guidance, supervision and co-ordination of the activities of the Jamat and its institutions and organizations, and the performance of such functions and the exercise of such jurisdiction and powers as maybe authorized and in particular but without limitation to:

(d) endeavor to secure continuing improvement in the quality of life of the Jamat, through appropriate policies and programmes in the area of education, health, social welfare, housing, economic welfare, cultural and women's activities, youth and sports development;

(e) analyse fundamental problems confronting the Jamat and their relationship to underlying trends in the national and international development process, and set short range and long range goals for the Jamat; . . . .

(h) provide humanitarian emergency assistance in the event of natural or man made disasters causing sickness, injury, starvation, homelessness, dislocation or other suffering and to take appropriate anticipatory and mitigating measures in respect of such disasters; (p. 13-14)

The transition and resettlement of the Afghan children and the families were facilitated based on the above aims and objectives of the Councils.

### **Data Collection**

The primary method of data collection in this study was through *photo conversations*. The photo conversations were scheduled at the convenience of the study participants and their parents and according to their choice conducted in their homes. In addition, I ensured that the interview setting was sufficiently quiet to allow clear audio taping and private enough to facilitate the interview process. I had a mutual understanding with the parents and the research participants prior to starting the interview; that if a guest were to arrive while the *photo conversation* was taking place I would discontinue the interview at that time or move to a private area. Each *photo conversation* took approximately one to one and a half hours. For this study one to two *photo conversations* with the Afghan refugee children resulted in a large data set for each participant. The photographs

facilitated the Afghan refugee children to describe who and what was important to them as well as their day-to-day life experiences in the aftermath of war. In the next few sections I describe the research procedures and data collection for the study.

### ***Photo Conversation Process***

The connector or facilitator made the initial telephone contact with the parents of Afghan refugee children. Each parent or head of the household who gave consent for his/her child to participate was informed about the research study and then referred to me. I contacted the research participants who had shown interest to the initial connectors or facilitators to participate in this study, to arrange for a time and an appropriate meeting place for the interview that was convenient for them. However, when I proceeded to explain further about the research study the first participant refused to participate in the study. When this same incident happened twice, the facilitator suggested that after he had talked over the telephone to the participant and the family I should accompany him to meet the family. This recommendation was discussed with my supervisor and she agreed to do that only if it was necessary. But first I should identify more connectors who were in contact with Afghan children and their families and to use the snowball method if necessary. I was successful recruiting participants with the assistance of more connectors and therefore did not have to use the snowball method. I was connected to one participant at a social function, two in the prayer place, and four over the telephone. At the first meeting in their home, I explained

the content of the consent forms to both parents and/or head of the family and the research participants.

During the first meeting I gave the research participants a disposable camera with 24 exposures and instructed them how to use it. I asked them to take pictures, over a two-week period of individuals, of things, events or celebrations that they considered important to them (Berman et al., 2001), as well to take pictures of a typical day in their lives. I informed them that they could use all of the pictures if they wished to do so. Moreover, I also requested them to collect any pictures of their choice that they already had at home, which they may want to use during the photo conversation. Initially, as proposed by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001), I planned to get permission from the parents and/or the head of the family and the research participants if I decided to use any of the photographs in publishing the final report and/or articles in professional journals or for educational purposes. I could not carry this out because the HREB did not approve it. I also provided a notebook to the research participants so that they could reflect and take notes as to why they took a particular picture. Some of the participants referred to these notebooks during photo conversations.

I also gave the participants the demographic data sheet (Appendix G), which included their age, education level, family income, and date or age of entry into Canada, to be filled in with the assistance of their parents. I reassured the participants and their parents/head of the family that all information in the demographic data sheet would be handled in a confidential manner and although



the information would be included in the final report, it would be done in such a way that they would not be identified. However, if they chose not to answer sensitive questions such as refugee status or family income, then they did not have to do so and it was acceptable. Only the three participants that signed the consent completed part of the demographic data sheet.

After two weeks I contacted the participants to ascertain whether they had finished taking their pictures and to collect the disposable cameras. I would develop one set of prints for the *photo conversations*. None of the participants used the disposable camera as they preferred to use the pictures that they already had at home, from their mobile phone and from their personal computer. According to the convenience of the participants and the parents all the *photo conversations* took place in the participants' homes. A date and time was also arranged that was convenient to each of them.

At the first *photographic conversation* I ensured that the tape recorder was functional. As an icebreaker, I had planned to ask the participants to share their experience of taking photographs. Since the children used photographs that they already had at home, I asked them to share with me; in what countries they had lived, where and at what age (Appendix H). Then using the pictures, the participants and I engaged in an in-depth dialogue. I allowed them to discuss the photographs in whichever order they wished. The participants conveyed the importance and meaning of their photographs. These photographs facilitated the Afghan children's self-reflection on the meaning of the pictures. I gave the

research participants an opportunity during the *photo conversations* to use any pictures of their choice that they already had in their homes. According to the experience of Berman et al. (2001) in their study of Bosnian refugees in which they used the *phototalk* method, the children spontaneously discussed their photographs and their meanings without probing and unconsciously began to discuss their lives in Bosnia and their transition to Canada. My photo conversations with the Afghan refugee children also evoked their experiences of day-to-day life experiences in the aftermath of war. I asked them one main question: *Tell me why this picture is important to you?* Initially they were hesitant to converse but then when they got immersed into the event and the people in the picture, they were able to relate the importance of the picture. I also probed them to tell me more about the people or the event that took place when the picture was taken and that further stimulated the *photo conversation*.

At the conclusion of the first *photo conversation*, I requested the participants to note in their journal if there was anything else about the meaning of the photographs that they would have liked to share so that they could tell me in the next meeting. In addition this would promote further reflection on their experiences and prepare them for the next time we met. I also informed them that an interpreter could be available in case they felt the need to relate some of their experiences in their national language of Farsi. They informed me that they were comfortable conversing in English with me. I arranged for the second meeting, keeping in mind the time that would be required for transcribing the first audio

taped *photo conversation*. In addition, I also provided my contact number in case the participants wished to call me before the next meeting. I had one or two *photo conversations* with each research participant. After each meeting, the audio taped photo conversation was transcribed for data analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

I conducted the data analysis using the Gadamerian-based research method, as outlined by Fleming et al. (2003), who identified five stages: (a) deciding on the appropriate research question, (b) identifying the preunderstanding, (c) gaining an understanding through a dialogic interview with participants, (d) gaining further understanding through dialogue with the text, and (e) establishing rigor. I utilized only the first four stages, because for the fifth stage I used Meleis's (1996) culturally competent criteria, which are discussed later in detail.

Since I have already discussed the first three stages of Gadamerian-based research method, as outlined by Fleming et al. (2003) previously; in this section I include only the fourth stage. Following this, I discuss the *photo conversations* and the use of Meleis's criteria to achieve rigor in this study.

### ***Gaining Further Understanding through Dialogue with Text***

The *photo conversations* with Afghan children were transcribed verbatim. During the analysis I "read these while listening to the words on the tape" (Fleming et al., 2003, p. 118); in particular, at the point of mutual understanding with the research participant (Fleming et al., 2003; Gadamer, 1960/1989). Taped

*photo conversations* and documented observations of the setting and nonverbal communications were considered part of the text (Fleming et al., 2003). Furthermore, to understand the day-to-day experiences of the Afghan children in the aftermath of war and the phenomenon of resilience, I maintained the hermeneutic circle by remaining open to the meaning of the text, moving from the whole to the part and back to the whole text, having ongoing discussions with my supervisor (Fleming et al., 2003). The following is a brief description of the analysis cycle identified by Fleming et al. (2003) that I followed.

1. To understand the day-to-day life experiences of Afghan refugee children in the aftermath of war and the phenomenon of resilience, I read all *photo conversation* texts as a whole to gain an understanding of the parts and take into account if the text was already influenced by my preunderstandings.
2. I examined first the stories and descriptions that the children provided. Then I looked at every sentence to identify how each child described their experiences particularly. I also looked for revealing phrases and words that fostered an understanding of this particular experience.
3. To maintain the hermeneutic circle based on *philosophical hermeneutics*, I related these sentences back to the meaning of the whole text to gain a deeper understanding of the full text.

4. I identified and documented passages that represented the shared and individual meanings of the research participants of the phenomenon of interest.
5. I repeated the whole cycle because I expected that my understanding would change over time. I stopped when I was satisfied that I had captured the essential aspects of the experiences of the Afghan children in the aftermath of war (Fleming et al., 2003).

Four themes that described the day-to-day life experiences of the Afghan children in the transitional country of Pakistan and Canada emerged. These included, cherishing the family, treasuring the Afghan culture, creating opportune spaces to dwell, and building and sustaining resilience. I also reviewed more literature to explore the experience of refugee children in the aftermath of war and documented what was pertinent.

### ***Achieving Rigor***

Establishing rigor in any research study is the responsibility of the researcher. I used the process that Meleis (1996) identified (eight criteria) for assessing rigor and credibility of culturally competent scholarship, which applied to the research that I conducted with Afghan refugee children who are in transition because of the impact of war in Afghanistan. These transitions have led to dislocation, loss of networks and supports, and varied opportunities and challenges for this population. These criteria were pertinent to the assessment of rigor in this study: (a) contextuality, (b) relevance, (c) communication styles,

(d) awareness of identity and power differentials, (e) empowerment, (f) disclosure, (g) time, and (h) reciprocation.

My experience of working in Afghanistan for a year as a nurse consultant prior to developing my research question gave me the opportunity to understand the broad historical and sociopolitical *context* of the issues, struggles, and challenges that Afghan refugee children face in the aftermath of war. Taking this experience into consideration, I developed this research study *relevant* to this population (Meleis, 1996). The method of hermeneutic photography allowed for a *communication style* suited to children affected by war (Berman et al., 2001). The technique of *photo conversation* that I used in this study *empowered* the Afghan refugee children to reflect on their experiences in the aftermath of war in the transitional country of Pakistan; also in the settlement country of Canada. They voiced their daily issues, challenges, and needs as refugees in both the countries. Moreover, my preunderstanding of the phenomenon of interest was discussed with the Afghan refugee children so that we both reached a new horizon of understanding. This is one example of how I as a nurse researcher attempted to mitigate the *power differentials* between the participants and myself as a nurse researcher (Meleis, 1996).

A flexible approach to *time* was also accommodated throughout the research study in order to develop trust and mutual respect in collaborating with the Afghan refugee children living in Canada to enhance their comfort level to *disclose* information related to the purpose of this research study. One limitation

of the disclosure was identified to be the language barrier because English is not the first language of Afghans. However, I paid special attention in recruiting the research participants to ensure that they were comfortable conversing in English. I had also planned that if the mother tongue was used to express symbols in the pictures that they took I would utilize the services of an interpreter and/or a translator and assured that they would also maintain confidentiality (Appendix I). However, this was not necessary as all the Afghan children in this study were able to converse in the English language.

A final assessment criterion of culturally competent scholarship (Meleis, 1996) is *reciprocity* between the researcher and the participants. I ensured the use of this criterion by analyzing the written text to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of interest through the experiences of the issues, challenges, and needs described by the Afghan refugee children living in Canada. I also shared my experiences where appropriate and laughed with them over things that are initially funny here when you come from another culture.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I treated all of the information and data that I collected as confidential. I used only pseudonyms with number codes in the transcripts and kept the key codes with me. Furthermore, I locked all of the information that I collected during this study. I ensured that none of the verbatim quotations or demographic data used in the thesis, presentations, or publications revealed the identity of the research participants. Only my supervisor and I had full access to the real names

and information of the participants, as well as access to the transcripts, to assist me with the analysis of the data. The information derived from this study will be stored in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta for a minimum of five years.

There were no direct benefits for the children participating in this study. However, the findings from this research study will give me the opportunity to bring about awareness of the needs of the research participants before the chair of the settlement committee of the Ismaili community and to the Edmonton Public School Board. In addition, I sincerely hope that the findings from this study will contribute to the existing knowledge of nursing science and practice and will assist in my future nursing education work in Afghanistan. My relationship with the children and their families will be a lasting benefit to me and I hope in some way, to the families themselves.

It has been my experience in doing volunteer work that research participants welcome the opportunity to share their day-to-day life experiences in the aftermath of war. Other researchers for example, Berman et al. (2001) have had similar experiences. However, throughout the *photo conversation* process I paid attention to the participants' emotional needs. I am an experienced pediatric nurse who is used to helping children to find appropriate strategies for dealing with these kinds of issues. In addition, the Catholic Social Services had offered the use of counselors (Appendix J) in case the research participants required professional assistance to discuss either unresolved issues or overwhelming



feelings about the adversities that they had faced. None of the participants showed any emotional distress during the *photo conversations*.

In the next four chapters I present the findings of the study with descriptions from the voices of the Afghan refugee children. I heard their words and how they described what was important to them. I increased my understanding from the Afghan children through the *photo conversations* that cherishing the family and treasuring the culture was important to them. Moreover, each member of the family and community played a vital role to facilitate them to find or create opportune places to dwell and this in turn promoted and sustained resilience in them. The Afghan refugee children in this study also tell us if we are ready to listen and understand that they have more needs in order to face the adversities of daily living while living in Canada.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CHERISHING THE FAMILY

Honour is the rock upon which social status rests and the family is the single most important institution in Afghan society. Individual honor, a positive pride in independence that comes from self-reliance, fulfillment of family obligations, respect for the elderly, respect for women, loyalty to colleagues and friends, tolerance for others, forthrightness . . . is a cultural quality most Afghans share. (Dupree, 2002, p. 978)

This chapter presents the analysis of data pertaining to the *photo conversations* with the Afghan refugee children who had chosen photographs of family members. With each family member identified by the participants, I have written a quote from the children to show what the person means to them individually. The main question that I asked was “Tell me why this photograph is important to you? Photo conversations flowed around family members including parents [mom and dad], grandparents [grandmother and grandfather], siblings, nephew and niece, uncles, aunts, pets, and members of the community such as family friends, neighbors and teachers. These were the conversations that occurred with each photo the children shared with me. I have integrated literature and my perspective of the stories shared by the Afghan refugee children through *photo conversations* as is appropriate using my chosen research methodology. Below I have a main heading, then a subheading with a quote from one of the children which speaks to the family member. I have not rewritten the children’s words but they appear here as they appear on the transcript. This way of presenting the data is in keeping with this methodology.

### **The Meaning and Importance of Family**

Family comes from the Latin word *familia* which means a household including relatives and servants. It also means those that are connected by blood and may or may not be living together in one household (Harper, 2001a). It is evident from the perspective of Darling (2005) that family facilitates the socialization, education and nurturance of its members. It is the foundational support structure of human society.

This study is about Afghan children and provides an Islamic perspective. “The basic social unit of Islamic society is the family. If Islam can be described as the soul of Islamic society, then the family might be seen metaphorically as its body” (Fernea & Moghadam, 2008, ¶ 2). *Ahl* or *ahila* is a more comprehensive term in the Arabic language and encompasses the nuclear family but may also include relatives of both parents such as grandparents, uncles, and cousins. “In its broadest sense, the family might be perceived as an even larger unit, equal to the *ummah*, or the group of believers in Islam, the Islamic community, or “family” itself” (Fernea & Moghadam, 2008, ¶ 2).

My understanding of an ideal family is that it is a group of people, not just blood relatives, who play important roles in the lives of each other and provide a circle of love and support on an ongoing basis including during times of calamity. I believe that family involvement should be consistent throughout the lives of the children and should be at a peak during the critical periods of growth and development to ensure that they do not feel lost or stranded. My own family

includes individuals in the community who have been there for me throughout my life especially at the time of making crucial decisions. It is because of the continuous encouragement and support from my family that I have been able to face adversities of poverty and pursue higher education. I wondered whether this kind of family involvement happened to the Afghan refugee children in this study when they all experienced so much movement, displacement, and instability in their lives.

Farooq elaborates his perspective that “family is important because the family takes care of you and if you do not have family then there is no one to take care of you.” Above, Farooq shows us how important a family is to a child. But he also includes the contingency of his awareness of not having someone to take care of him. This shows that tension about family is ever present in Farooq’s perception of a family. As well, he knew the story of how his father was recruited, when Farooq was very young, to be a soldier during one of the wars. He also knew the anxiety the whole family experienced knowing that they could lose his father forever in the war. I did see photos of this young father as a soldier. Farooq knows this story well.

### ***Parents***

*“Every time I want something they [parents] are always there for me.”*  
(Sonu)

I endeavor below to elaborate what parents mean to the Afghan refugee children in this study. Sonu tells us that the continuous presence of her parents is important to her. The knowledge that whenever she needs something, it will be

provided by her parents gives her comfort and confidence to face whatever the future holds for her.

All of the participants in this study valued their parents within the family unit in diverse ways. Some of the children just wanted to show me the old photograph of their parents as to how they looked before and how they have changed over time, while others had a touching story to share. This is how the children played with the photos, studying them and presenting them in their own way. The children enjoyed doing this and took a lot of pride in sharing the photos with me.

Sonu shared a picture of her parents at Niagara Falls in Canada. I asked, “Why is this picture important to you?” She responded with words of appreciation of her parents:

It [picture of parents] is important to me because they are my parents and they brought me into this world. So without them I wouldn't be here and I love them more. They send me to school so that I can have good education, they buy me clothes, they get me food, and every time I want something they are always there for me when you need it . . . the fact that they brought me here [to Canada]. They take me to places like this [Niagara Falls] sometimes and that they make sure that I have and do different things in my life too, and that I am not left out from other kids in my school. So Yeah! That is one of the big things and the clothes they buy me so that I am in fashion and not left out. So I guess that is basically it.

I was really moved with what Sonu told me about her parents. She is only 14 years old and has already thought through all the things that her parents have done for her so far and that they are always around when she needs anything.

Parkins (2004) researched sources that brought or hindered hope from the perspectives of refugee and immigrant children during resettlement in Canada and

found that parental support was very important to them. According to Luthar, Sawyer, and Brown (2006), in a literature review of over 50 years on childhood resilience show that good positive parent-child relationships can generate “feelings of confidence, security, and self-efficacy” (p. 111) in children. Garnezy (1991) also identified earlier that support from parents is a protective factor that instills hope and further promotes resilience in children.

Sonu painted this picture of being protected by her parents who nurtured her by ensuring that her basic needs are met. In addition, she is thankful that her parents migrated to Canada so that she could have a better life than if she was still in Pakistan or Afghanistan. She also mentioned that her parents send her to school and buy her clothes that are in fashion so that she does not go through the tension of being treated as the *other* and can blend easily with her friends. Sonu has observed how her parents continue to work hard to get where they are at present.

Meera also treasured the picture of herself with her parents in Afghanistan. It was rare that children were able to bring with them too many personal belongings from back home as they left in a rush to save their lives. Therefore, the picture of Meera with her parents was very precious and she explained with passion:

Well! [Big smile] I like this picture of my dad, my mom and me . . . I was probably 2 years old . . . in particular because it’s the best family picture back then of us together, well it was 11 or 12 years ago when we were living in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Meera liked seeing herself as a small child. This is the only baby picture she had of herself and her parents in Afghanistan. She noted the different clothes

her parents wore from what they wear in Canada and she especially noted that her father had a beard in the photo but he does not have one now. Growing a beard at the time protected Meera's father from being harmed by the Taliban.

In addition, I noticed that Meera was dressed as a boy. Meera told me that her parents dressed her that way for a long time as they wanted a son very badly and they thought she looked cute dressed as a boy. She thought for the longest time that she had a brother that she may have lost. So she asked her parents about it and they told her that they dressed her like a boy because they wanted a son. Meera said that initially she was distressed looking at this picture but now she laughs about it. Meera seemed very comfortable talking about this otherwise she would not have presented this photograph to me. And I noted her close relationship with her parents.

Afghan refugee children value their parents. This was very clear when talking to them about each photo. I will now describe how each parent played an important role in their lives.

### ***Mother***

*“She works very hard [to] grow up me, she has given her all her half life to us and she is trying her best to encourage us to go to school and learn.”*  
(Gulshan)

Similar to Sonu, Gulshan also honors her mother by having high regard for her. Most children also talked about their mother with a lot of endearment and closeness. The Holy Qur'an chapter (31:14) has commanded people that, “We have enjoined upon man concerning his parents-His mother beareth him in

weakness upon weakness and his weaning is in two years-Give thanks unto me and unto thy parents. Unto me is the journeying” (Pickthall, 1989, p. 330). There is also a very famous traditional saying of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) that, “Heaven lieth at the feet of the mothers” (Azizullah, 1972, p. 92). It means more than that; the mother should be treated with respect and devotion. It is the *mother* who carries the child in her womb, bears the pain during delivery and ensures that the child is not starving by breastfeeding. Therefore, not only appreciating but also serving the mother is the sure key to paradise. This traditional teaching relating to the importance of mother is very apparent in the description given by the Afghan children.

Meera expressed the role of her mother as an advisor: “If I have any problems with anything I would just talk to my mom . . . and she gives me like a solution as to what to do.” Meera also does fun things with her mom like watching movies at home or in the cinema. In addition, she accompanies her mother to meetings. Meera continued looking at her picture with her mother in a park saying: “I just love hanging around with my mom and I am closer to her than I am with my dad.” I asked Meera if she was closer to her mother because she was with her more than her father. She responded:

No I am with both of them but I don’t know I am a bit closer to my mom. Like they are both the same to me but I am closer to my mom. . . . Because if I had any problems with anything I would just talk to my mom, it’s practically everything, I tell her almost everything. . . . If I have been having problems in school or girls teasing me or bullying, I just talk to her and she gives me like a solution as to what to do.



Sonu was also very appreciative of her mother. She related that “[Mom] doesn’t like camping like my dad, me and my brother; still she just comes because she wants us kids to have fun. I don’t like to go without my mom. . . . So she comes with us.” Moreover, mother to Sonu is a problem solver and a good listener because when she has problems she talks to mom and not to her friends. Parkins (2004) had similar responses from the refugee and immigrant children in her study regarding the mother. For example, a 14 year old girl describes her mother as “my very very hope. . . . if I am in trouble she will go to the school and fix it. Yah, she is really really good” (Parkins, p. 42-43). Mothers are important beings that facilitate overcoming hurdles in life.

Gulshan related the importance of mother when she experienced distress due to bad weather in Pakistan: “It was bad [hot weather in Pakistan] and then one time it was raining and when I came back from Jamatkhana [prayer place] the rain was up to here [pointing to her waist] it was bad and I did not like it.” Hence she went to her mother for solace.

Gulshan also had a photo conversation with me about her visit to Afghanistan with her father in 2006. She took me to her bedroom to show me the photographs on the computer of her family members in Afghanistan whom she met either after a long time or for the first time. Upon asking about her choice of living in Afghanistan, she responded:

No! [Not] without my family and it was very hard and I missed them. I promised them [family in Afghanistan] that I am not going to go there again without my mother [laughs] . . . I really missed my mom and I have

never gone anywhere without my mother anywhere and this was the first time.

Gulshan not only loves her mother but also respects and obeys her mother according to the traditional teaching of Islam. When she was asked by her mother to give her achievement award [a cup] to her cousin when she was leaving Pakistan, she gave it away despite it being precious to her. Honoring the wish of the mother is considered more valuable in Islam than one's own desire.

Tayreez listens to her mother too when she asks her to clean the house. She loves it as well as feels special when her mom uses endearments such as “my little daughter” and “Oh! you are so nice with me.” Her mother also kisses her because she agrees to clean the house. In addition, Tayreez goes to her mom and eldest sister if she has certain issues to discuss rather than going to her father. Azim also chooses to go to his mother especially when he feels lonely.

Farooq provided examples of his mother being concerned and caring:

I would tell my ma [about being hit in school] and then my mom would say are you Ok? She would check my work log and she could not do anything and she would put some Vaseline and stuff on my back and then she would make me study more and sometimes she yells [at] me and she watches my work. Another example is that my sister's birthday came before mine. . . . I thought that it was my birthday next day, I got mad and I started crying and I was really upset and then my mom tried to explain to me and she went out and got another cake for me the next day. That is how much my mom cared.

Farooq craved to gain his mother's trust when he was young and living in Pakistan in order to please his mother even if it meant risking his life. Was it because he wants to repay her for taking care of him? Or was it to ease the burden

of his parents? Or was it sibling rivalry? I am more inclined to think that Farooq also wanted to help his mother by playing a miniscule part in fetching milk and bread for breakfast every day, just like his sister. This is his reflection of how he got to the stage of being trusted by his mother to be able to venture alone in the streets of Pakistan:

One morning my mom was sick and she trusted my sister because she is a little older than me. I really wanted to go and got really upset [when my mom did not allow me] and so I just followed her [sister], but I was hiding. I wanted to show my mom that she could trust me [that I knew where to go]. So after that she let me go there too. When I was small all I really cared was for my mom's trust.

The children describe their attachment to their mother in diverse ways.

Why is it that they respond differently to the mother than the father? It could be that physiologically, every cell in our being grows to the beat of our mothers' heartbeat and gets nourished by her blood. Both happy and sad emotions felt by her are embodied within us before birth (Northrup, 2006). This could be the reason why the Afghan refugee children in this study feel more connected to their mothers.

Fathers also play an important role in the lives of the Afghan refugee children. When they spoke about their father, it was different. This may be due to the father playing an authoritative role in the family.

### *Dad*

*"Dad is important because he does things that my mom does, but in a boy's way."* (Farooq)

During photo conversation Farooq shared a photograph of his father holding a bicycle. He described the changes of his father's looks, his lifestyle, and the clothes he was wearing in Afghanistan in comparison to Canada:

This picture [of dad] is important to me because it shows me how my dad looked [with moustache] and how he went around using a bike. . . . Also it shows me that there was not much to see in Afghanistan just all regular clothes and my dad was not very rich in Afghanistan and how lucky he is now. . . . He told me that my mom's family was rich [in Afghanistan] and his family was not rich [and that] he used his bike as transportation . . . he thought himself a lucky person because the bike is expensive as the car.

From my lived experience in Afghanistan, I observed that even buying a bicycle is hard due to the poverty that still exists. Some Afghans walk to work to save money on transportation. However, if an Afghan works with an NGO then transportation is provided but they still need to get around on their own at other times. Therefore, for Farooq's dad to own a bike was a big asset. When I asked, why is dad important to you? Farooq responded that:

Because he does things that my mom does, but in a boy's way . . . He tells me about car parts and when my bike . . . something happens to it, he helps me to fix it. . . . He does not like to hit me or my sister or my little brother. Usually in Afghani people, it is usually the dad that you are scared of.

Farooq tells us that he has developed a good rapport with his father and enjoys being with him as he teaches him to fix things. This added skill that he has learnt from his father will help him in the future. Izzat shared a picture taken in Pakistan when she was approximate nine or ten years old standing by her father sitting on a couch and spoke about her dad with a lot of admiration. He played a

very important role in encouraging and facilitating her to continue upgrading her English skills while she was in Pakistan. She stated:

Actually my dad he was trying to send us everywhere that if there was a little bit important for our study and those kinds of things. He was like “Oh there is an English Academy that is started and then you have to go there whether you have time or not I don’t care but you have to go there” Yeah! [laughs].

Dad was clearly very much a part of the children’s life but in a different way than the mother. The children were clear that their father was very important to them. He was a decision maker, and they looked up to him as an authority figure. In this study, most of the fathers accompanied their children when fleeing from Afghanistan, which was in favor of the children. In one or two cases, the fathers went ahead to look for a job so when the family joined them they were stabilized economically. According to Bacallao and Smokowski (2007), the Latino family voiced that the absence or separation of father for more than a year usually creates family stress, significant changes in family roles and patterns of functioning.

The children also tell stories about experiences of their daily lives with their father that belies the fact that he is distant from them. But the children would prefer to go to their mothers first with problems. Then the mother talks to the father and brings the problem/issue forward. Referring to various research studies about fathers in non-Afghan culture, Friedman, Bowden, and Jones (2003), mentioned that despite mother’s roles in terms of child-rearing being child centered, fathers participate in their child’s care and socialization in a meaningful

manner. The interaction of fathers with their children also appears to be warm and nurturing but in a different way. According to Crockett, Brown, Russell, and Shen (2007), Mexican American teenage children identified a different relationship with mothers and fathers. Mothers were identified as showing open affection and were emotionally supportive while fathers asked them about their day, which also implied caring. While different cultures seem to have their own customs, it seems children find it easier to bring a problem to their mother first.

### ***Grandparents***

The other important members of the family mentioned by children were the paternal grandparents. Most of the children in my study have lost their grandparents but they had the opportunity to be with them while they were in Afghanistan and/or in Pakistan and shared fond memories with them.

In the Afghan culture it is normally the paternal grandparents who stay with the family and take over the child rearing activities while the daughter-in-law takes over the household chores. Due to the war and migration most parents and grandparents had to work to survive. Therefore the child rearing was shared between parents and grandparents. Mostly grandparents are valued for taking on the task of *tarbia* (Kanji et al., 2007) and passing on diverse knowledge of life experiences (Derr, 2006). Grandparents taking on the responsibility of parenting keep them socially involved with their grandchildren thereby decreasing parental anxiety of having to go to work and leaving the children alone at home (Weine et al., 2004). In addition, grandparents also love their grandchildren and often spoil

them as well as become their lifelong mentors. The Afghan children acknowledge the important roles of both grandmother and grandfather in their lives.

### ***Grandmother***

*“I call my grandma ‘mother gulkhand.’ ‘Gul’ means a flower and ‘Khand’ means sugar or sweet” (Sonu).*

Sonu cherishes the memories of growing up with her grandmother [Dad’s mother] in Pakistan. She shared a picture of herself with her grandma and conveyed clearly through *photo conversations* that she adores her grandma as much as she loves her mother. Although presently grandma lives in another city in Canada, distance does not hinder Sonu from communicating with her. Sonu continues to keep in touch with grandma by telephone with a loonie phone card and talks to her about her issues or problems on an ongoing basis. Grandma has always played a vital role in her life and continues to do so even at present. Sonu expressed that:

I was the first baby so everybody in my family loved me, specially my grandma. I think I was more with my grandma than my mom. . . . I remember she loves me a lot . . . [pause] Yeah! [happy face] I like her [grandma] so much. Her and my mom are equal. I don’t know. I love them both the same way. My grandma has like taught me everything. She has basically like loves to spoil me. Every year on my birthday she sends me 100 or 50 dollars and she loves me a lot. She buys me anything I want and she loves me a lot.

Sonu shared the picture she treasures of her grandma kissing her as it brings back lots of good memories. She shared her special relationship with grandma:

I call my grandma “mother gulkhand.” Gul means a flower and “Khand” means sugar or sweet. This is the first time [pointing at the picture] I saw her when she came to Canada. My father paid for her ticket to come to Canada. She brought so much stuff for me. The [special] outfit that I am wearing, she brought it for me from Pakistan. You can see she loves me a lot. You know if I tell her what I need she will buy for me. . . . If I have problems with mom, I ask grandma. I buy loonie phone cards and talk to grandma all the time over the phone . . . my grandma gives me best advice . . . [Grandma had a] big hand in raising me, my mom used to work there [in Pakistan]. Even though it was hard work for grandma like cleaning the house of other people she played games and cards with me [in Pakistan].

Sonu connects with her grandma over the phone but it is not the same as being face to face with her. I could sense Sonu’s nostalgia for being with her grandma. Was she really here in the room with me? Was Sonu trying to be here with me, making an effort because we were talking about her grandma? Or was she lost in her thoughts of grandma? I think she was present with me as well as visioning being with grandma in her mind’s eye. Almaas (1992) talks about the importance of being in the presence, to stop dreaming and hoping about future things because it is the “greatest betrayal” (p. 61). The author further explains that happiness can be found in the present moment, to enjoy simple things in life by just being here in the present, in the reality. I agree with Almaas about being present to what is happening right now but I have difficulty agreeing with Almaas (1992) about not hoping for something. Hope does not betray you but creates wings. It takes you to envision a future and gives you a purpose to live. Sonu cherishes the fond memories and has found comfort in hearing grandma’s voice over the phone until she sees her again. This hope of seeing grandma in person



one day helps her to keep her grandmother alive in her present life in Edmonton and more so, to continue to keep her alive in Sonu's being.

Farooq also reflected on the precious memories of his grandma while living in Pakistan:

My grandma has always been there, when I was growing up like from the beginning probably till the end, Oh! She was like my mother and every time I needed help, my mom would be at work and she would take care of me. When we moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan, she [grandma] came with us and she got an apartment right next to us, so she was living like across us, like two houses. Once we bought a TV, because we were getting richer and richer and we put it in our grandma's house as she had more space in her house. Then my mother promised I could see an action movie, but when she refused my grandma would let me watch it and I was happy. I remember, my grandma would take me to the Jamatkhana [prayer house] everyday, which was big, really really big and lots of big stairs. . . . Every day we went to Jamatkhana and then she would also buy ice cream [for me] on the way back.

Just as grandmothers play an important role in rearing grandchildren, so do the grandfathers. Azim tells us how he was cared for and spoiled by his grandfather and more so because he was a grandson and not a granddaughter.

### ***Grandfather***

*"The cool thing about him that I love so much is that he never got stressed or got mad [angry] whatever happened . . ."* (Azim)

Azim shared the picture of his grandfather that he adored and misses his companionship. Besides admiring his temperament there are other memories that Azim continues to cherish. This is what he values:

People back home . . . love having grandsons rather than granddaughters. My grandma did not care about that but my grandpa wanted grandsons. I was like a prince and we were like twenty four hours and seven days a week together and he got me anything that I wanted. . . . He used to take

me to school everyday and if I did not want to go he would convince me and he would take me to the bazaar . . . you know like market and sit with him. . . . Listening to big people and I was getting effect [learning good things] like that . . . and he used to tell me that it is not good to play all the time. . . . I was with him you know the whole time I was with him. . . . I miss him so much.

Grandparents to these children are an extension of their roots and play a significant role in their lives. Grandparents within the Afghan culture are very well respected (Dupree, 2002) and I have observed that they have always been given the authority by their children to ensure the well-being of grandchildren. They continue to be a guide when their grandchildren face challenging situations in their new cultures. I also observed that grandchildren are also willingly taking over the responsibility of caring for grandparents if required. Sonu's great grandmother was visiting them and needed assistance to go to the bathroom. The youngest sibling around the age of seven volunteered to assist her and waited outside the door until she was ready to return to the living room. I was informed by Sonu that it was his responsibility to take great grandma to the washroom and ensure that great grandma is comfortable. I observed the close relationship between them.

### ***Siblings***

Children manage to generate a feeling of love and caring among their family members. Depending on the order of the child in the family each Afghan refugee child takes on the role that fits best in that moment. The roles change from being cared by the older sibling to caregiver for the younger brother/sister. The male child generally plays a protective role and is more favored in the

Afghan family. The female child does the household chores. Despite the differences in gender and rank of each child, the Afghan refugee children supported each other in diverse ways.

**Brother.** *“Even though we fight so much we were best friends.” (Sonu)*

Sonu is the oldest in the family and has two younger brothers. She had pictures of them and reminisced about the precious time she spent, and continues to spend, with each of them with a lot of fondness. Kim, McHale, Osgood and Crouter (2006), concur with Sonu as they reveal that sibling relationships are often the longest lasting relationships in an individual’s life and that their influences has a significant impact on the well-being and development of youth.

I love him [younger brother] so much. We always played games together. We had no other kid, right. My dad [and] mom would go to work [in Pakistan] and we would stay home and we would be locked in. . . . You know how my dad explained to you earlier . . . we would be locked in and so we spent most of our lives in this house so we just spent most of the time in the house, we played games and stuff . . . and I remember [laughs] we had this ball [pointing at the picture] and we would pass it back and forth. (Sonu)

Leaving children alone at home while the parents go to work may not be acceptable in the Western world. However, I have grown up in the developing world and it is normal to leave children at home to look after each other and a neighbor is always watching out. I have had similar experience of support while living in Pakistan; my neighbor always looked after my son when he was not feeling well while I continued to go to work.

Sonu considered her younger brother as a friend. This is what she said:

It is weird. I like him a lot because he is my first brother; I have spent most of my childhood when he was baby and playing with him and stuff. He was really nice. Even though we fight so much we were best friends.

Gulshan shared a picture of her younger brother and herself sitting on the grass outside their house in Kabul [Afghanistan]. “This is a picture of my younger brother, we were so friendly and we took a lot of pictures together all the time.” When I asked: “How do you get along with your younger brother now?” Gulshan responded: “It is good, we are always joking.” But the relationship with her older brother is different. He is away from home but he keeps in touch through telephone conversations and carries his responsibilities of protector and advisor. In some cultures, the oldest child is automatically accorded the responsibility for the younger children and thereby receives some grounding in a leadership role. In addition, the oldest child often assumes the responsibilities of parents (Friedman et al., 2003). Gulshan related during photo conversation:

My older brother who is in England always phones every Sunday and he talks to me and he always says that I should study, do good job, do this, do that and I say OK! Ok! [laughs].

While Tayreez is always having arguments with her brother and since he is the only boy child and the youngest, he gets away with everything. However, they were great buddies when they were young and Tayreez shared some fond memories about her brother. In this study both the intimate and the conflict relationship existed between siblings. Also, Kim et al., (2006) in his study found that sibling relationships from middle childhood through adolescence demonstrate the typical ‘love-hate’ relationship. Moreover, they explicated that based on the

birth order, sex, and dyad constellation the relationships between siblings vary.

Tayreez explained that:

This is a picture in our second house that we moved to [Canada]. I don't know what is happening here and he [brother] was dressed in a dragon suit. It shows how we were very close when we were young. Two of my sisters were close and then the two of us were very close and always hung out together . . . [pause] this is the only picture I have that we are hugging like this and it is really special to me and it shows how young we were and how close we were.

Tayreez continued looking at the picture and chuckled. She further commented that, "I remember we always used to hang out together and he used to look out for me that I don't get hurt." I observed that Tayreez's face lighted up so I was tempted to question further: "What kinds of things did he look out for?"

Like [pause] like when we were in elementary . . . because I looked small and people were bugging me he would tell them "stop bugging her or I will hit you or beat you" and although he is my younger brother he would act as my older brother. . . . Three years ago so [I was] in grade 7 we got more friends and we want to do stuff with our friends and not each other and so we just separated. I am more girly now and less tom boyish and he is more boyish and I am like whatever and so we just grew apart I guess.

Tayreez kept on looking at the picture and I observed her facial expressions and saw a smile as if she was walking through the memory lane. I let her reminisce until she verbalized: "Yeah! [a big smile on her face] this picture shows how close we were." Tayreez was eager to share more about her closeness with her younger brother:

Uhm! [thinking] Oh yeah! We would always walk home together from school in elementary and it got really dark and he would like wait for me till my classes were over and then we would go home together. We would always walk home together. . . . Oh! I taught him how to tie his shoe laces.

We used to do that for him all the time and I taught him how to count till 100.

*Sister.* “When I really feel bad...she boosts my self-esteem and like makes me laugh” (Tayreez).

Tayreez shared a photograph with her oldest sister and relates her feelings:

My eldest sister because I will talk to her and she will like understand like such as like whatever . . . she makes me feel special too I don't know because I really care for her and we are really close and this shows how close me and her are. . . . I go to my mom for some things. If there are sister issues then I go to my sister . . . Like my girly girly issues. I go to my [oldest] sister . . . [pause] like sometimes when I really feel bad she kind of makes fun of it and that I should not worry about it and stuff and she boosts my self-esteem and like makes me laugh and I don't know that she just makes me feel better by myself and I do that to her as well if she is feeling down I guess.

Similarly, Farooq, mentioned that the picture with her older sister is important simply “*because she is my sister.*” Although they used to fight a lot when they were younger “*now it's different*” and he laughs when he reflects on it. They still fight but for different reasons. He affectionately recalls several incidents with his sister, including the fighting and fun things that they did together. For example, when they were younger they used to play with soap and make bubbles when washing dishes. He admits proudly that if there is an argument with his sister, he usually wins. He loves his sister because she helps him with his homework and he truly believes that in return he helps her to dress appropriately as “she dresses weird.”

A new addition to the family is a blessing and an amazement of life experience. It gave the children an opportunity to witness the wonder of human growth and development within the family unit.

*New baby. "I got to like learn more about the baby and stuff. . . . It was just more personal . . ."* (Sonu)

Sonu has two younger brothers. One photo conversation was about the youngest brother at the age of two, who gave Sonu the opportunity of learning about babies. She referred to her youngest sibling as an addition to the family that came into this world as a gift from the universe. She related her view of her youngest sibling [excitement in her voice]:

Yeah! Believe it or not, we thought we did not know that we would have another person because nobody knows. We all just thought it was just going to be the two of us. But then he was born, we didn't know that we would have him because no one knows that. Our whole lives changed completely . . . It was just a good fun moment . . . happy moment . . . I've never like had a baby in front of me the whole time [glow on the face]. So, when he came, I got to like learn more about the baby and stuff . . . it was just more personal, I could play with [him], I did not have anyone there. And its just like he was talking to me . . . when I was with him time would go by quickly and we would have a lot of fun.

Farooq had brought a picture of his baby brother [youngest in the family]. He felt very strongly that his younger brother was an asset to him in many ways and took it upon himself to watch out for him so he does not get into trouble. I asked Farooq, "What does your little brother do that you love him so much? He responded:

When he was first born, I liked his little hands and little toes, so funny and then I like him because he is a little boy and now he like wrestles with me and has fun with me. . . . My sister still loves my brother but if he was a

girl, she would love him more . . . I like him because he wants to go out and stuff. Before it was just me and now I have him. When he was young he broke my Sega game and I was so mad and now I realize it was funny. My mom told me that when I was young and when I broke things I would look at her with such big eyes and that is what my little brother does too! He looks so confused. So I just pat him on the back and tell him see what you did? I also watch for him because I do not like him to get into trouble so I try and take the blame. When I am 20, he will be almost my age that is 13 years and I will let him have so much fun, that I did not have. I will let him have all the fun he wants like I will buy what he wants like shirts and nice pants . . . and let him have all the fun he wants. Because [I know that] kids they care about toys and stuff and now all I care about are designer clothes [laughs]

Farooq's amazement with his brother's little body seemed to contribute to his awe of life. Siblings felt responsible for each other; older siblings embodied this responsibility as Farooq shows in his playing and tumbling with his brother as well as watching out for him. The children demonstrated this in their protection of the younger sibling in their daily life, their imparting knowledge of growing up in a responsible way, and their encouragement to study and becoming something for a better future. Younger siblings respected older siblings and their advice and care just like their respect for the authority figure of their father.

### ***Extended Family***

For Afghan children family members mean more than the western concept of a nuclear family unit [parents and siblings]. A family may include aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins and their in-laws. Similar to Latinos, lives of Afghans are deeply influenced by an extended family system (Bacallo & Smokowski, 2007; Falicov, 2007; Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, &



Gold, 2006) as the children show here. Whether the family is within the country or outside, staying in touch and connected with family members is important.

Farooq shared a photo of his aunt during photo conversation. When I asked, “why is she [dad’s sister] important to you?” Farooq responded with a story:

She is my only true aunty. . . . She took care of me she got me out of trouble and stuff. . . . Once I was desperate for juice [in Pakistan], I put a pillow on the ground so when I jump down I could land softly and nobody would know. Nobody knew and then when I was looking for juice in the cupboard and I banged into the glasses and all the glasses fell down and I thought I am going to be in so much trouble, I am going to be in trouble and I jumped down and there was so much glass but I did not care about getting hurt and I was just thinking that I am going to be in trouble and I ran across to my grandma’s place and to my aunt and she saw me. She asked me why I looked so worried and I told her no I do not look worried and she told me to tell her what was wrong and I told her what I did and she came home and helped me clear the place and told my mom not to hit me. She took me everywhere with her. She would take me to the movies and I would play with the games in the movies.

In many Eastern cultures, members of extended family for example, an uncle may act like a surrogate father even when the father is present, without straining the relationship between father and son (Friedman et al., 2003). Farooq related how his uncle played an important role in his life:

When I was small I wanted to grow muscle, and by the balcony there was a door and there was this thing [you could hold from which you could swing] . . . and I would hold the top and he [dad’s brother] would hold me by the leg [so I could swing]. . . . I saw how people do it on TV and he says like you can do it. He told me that he is not holding me and I thought I am doing it [swinging] by myself and I thought . . . why they make it look so hard on TV. I [saw] that [my uncle was] sweating so much and I am wondering why he is sweating so much. And now I know that it was my uncle [helping me to swing]. . . . I saw him this summer [2007] and he took me everywhere with him like CN tower, and he has a really nice car,

he put a really nice muffler in the car. He took a racing car and put some parts in his car and showed it to me. One day in the parking lot, he showed me how the car drives.

Gulshan proudly shared pictures of her nephew and niece and this is what she related:

Yes! [Opening the picture album] these are my older brother's two kids, one son and one daughter. . . . I love them very much . . . son is four [pointing to the picture] . . . He is giving milk to his sister and daughter is three and she [laughs] really likes to read a book and I am reading for her, and she can talk better than her brother and she says I am doctor, doctor, and she really likes to study [face lights up] . . . they visit us at home. . . . Sometimes they come and sleep over and sometimes we...my mother and me and my sister go [to their home].

Having a large family meant that the Afghan refugee children had nephews and nieces with whom they were very close. Although they may not live in the same house due to various reasons, they visited each other almost every weekend. It was very important to keep connected.

*Staying in touch with family within Canadian borders.* Over two decades of war in Afghanistan resulted in splitting the family apart from each other. Considering that the family unit is very precious to the Afghan children and their families, staying in touch with the family is very important. Depending on the circumstances, some participants visited their family within and outside Canadian borders to keep in touch, while others kept in touch by telephone. They also had the option of keeping connected through the internet but the Afghan children and their families preferred talking over the phone as they felt more connected. Meera shared her picture of her family at the Calgary zoo:

We went to Calgary for the weekend. We had just bought a car then so just a couple of months after. . . . It was me, my mom and my dad, my mom's uncle's family. . . . My uncle his wife, four sons and one daughter. . . . We were all new and we got lost and stuff but when we got there like it was really fun and stuff . . . Oh! I actually saw a peacock there and I was chasing after it. . . . I had fun with my family...

Similarly, Gulshan also has family in Calgary and they all go together to Banff in the summer time. For Gulshan family means “sister, mother, father, older sister's mother-in-law and father-in-law. . . . My father's uncle . . .” Farooq discussed about his family going to Toronto which included himself, his mom, mom's brother, dad and his uncle. Farooq further explained that “he is not really my uncle but I call him my uncle because he is a friend of my dad [from] Afghanistan, but he was there too.” Sonu also visited Toronto but since it was only once in two years she connected with the family members over the phone. Falicov (2007) affirmed that keeping connections with one's country as well as with extended family members is more plausible at present than in the past because of the availability of high technology. He further asserted that keeping in touch with family has considerable “emotional benefits, which may even include healing some wounds from the past” (p.164).

*Staying in touch with family beyond Canadian borders.* Meera shared her experience of visiting her family in Pakistan with her mother. Family members to Meera meant grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, and cousins in Pakistan and Afghanistan. She shared her experience of meeting her family after a long time:

Well! When I first went there, first of all, every one like my cousins and all my uncles and everybody was there at my uncle's house. . . . When we first went there everyone was gathering around me and I was getting

scared and moving against the wall . . . everyone was gathering around me because they have not seen me for seven years or something. I did not remember them much . . . I have six cousins from one family and about eight from another family. Each one of them had lots of kids and there was the whole room was filled like, my mom was in one room and I was in the other room [In Pakistan]. There is like one [room] was stuffed with children and the other was stuffed with adults like my mom and grandparents and everybody in one room so it was two separate rooms I have a large family. Later on in the two months . . . I got to know everybody and recognize my cousins and actually had lots of fun.

Meera shared with me that she misses her family in Pakistan and therefore continues to keep in touch with them. This is how Meera keeps in touch with her family in Pakistan:

I keep in touch with them. We call them every week or so . . . before I just knew them by name, I did not know much about them but when I went there [to Pakistan], I became really close to them. . . . I got to know everybody like my uncle and aunts. . . . I don't know why but in Edmonton it gets so boring sometimes. There [in Pakistan] like everybody lives close by so you can just walk to their house and go back and forth and people are not so busy there.

Gulshan also shared a picture of having a picnic with her family in Afghanistan by the Kabul River during her recent visit with her father in 2006. [Pointing at the picture] "This is mother's sister and her husband . . . they never left Afghanistan. This is grandmother's picture and her daughter." I inquired if it was Gulshan's dad's mother. She responded, "No! Just grandmother I call her [laughs], just my father's something. I call her grandma because she is an older woman [to respect the older person]."

Staying in close touch with family members has its advantages. Children in this study identified that being protected by family members in certain circumstances gave them courage to go forward in life.

*Togetherness inspires courage.* For the Afghan children, togetherness of the extended family rebuilds confidence in their lives (Weine et al., 2004). It is like a circle of support instilling courage within its members when required and being there for each other in times of crisis. The children in this study identified a strong sense of family closeness and support that harnesses protective effects (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007) and therefore promotes resilience in them. Sonu shared a picture of all the family members during a camping trip and shared her story of how she almost drowned.

There was a lake and the water was going [flowing] really fast, and all my cousins were going on the other side [across the water]. . . . There were rocks in the middle like here and there [pointing at the spots in the picture] and it was still very hard though, because there was the water [which] was coming at a very fast pace right, and we could have slipped, so I was really scared but because all my cousins were going and so I decided to go . . . what happened was that I was almost in the middle. . . . My feet slipped, so I was in the water and it was taking me away but I was holding on to a rock. . . . I did not know how to swim, I don't know how right, I don't go swimming but uhm . . . the thing was that I was stuck and I was like . . . thinking that the water was going to take me away, it was really hard and then my aunty and all the other ones who were on the other side . . . and they all came and helped me come up.

Sonu shared another fearful incident during camping and relayed the importance of the family being together:

In the middle of night, everybody was awake because somebody told that they saw a bear [laughs]. Yeah! and everyone ran and we did not have enough room in the van as we were a lot of people, so we were all

squished up and finally there was room for everybody and everybody was scared because somebody saw this bear. We didn't camp there but we spent the night inside the van. Yah! It was scary I guess.

These warm bodies of family members did not care about the availability of space for comfort. They were concerned for the safety of each other and that is why they stayed together despite the discomfort of not having enough space to rest for the night.

### ***Community as Family***

While I was in Afghanistan, I observed that Afghan families lived together in communities and that is how they were able to support each other. When they migrated to Pakistan and Canada they again tried to dwell around their own community so that they could continue to approach each other for support. Those families that arrived earlier became mentors of families who arrived later in the year. This mentoring relationship empowered the new arrivals to tap into services that already existed (Falicov, 2007) and for which they were eligible. In addition, the Pakistani and Canadian Ismaili Councils were organized to receive the Afghani refugee Ismailis for smooth transition into both countries.

According to Falicov (2007) ethnic communities potentially provide spiritual and religious resources. In the case of Afghani refugee children in this study and their family, they received not only spiritual and religious help from their Ismaili ethnic community but also received social assistance for a smooth transition in both countries. Therefore, these Afghan refugee children had a strong support system in place when they entered both Pakistan and Canada. However,

the Afghan refugee families became closer to the families that were from their own cultural background. They became like one big family and went for outings together on weekends. Teachers and counselors, neighbors and friends are also considered part of the family as they play a significant role in the development of children. They are also included in the circle of supports similar to the extended family members.

**Teacher.** *“If I did not understand, anything . . . she [teacher] would explain to me and helped me a lot in my studies.”* (Sonu)

Sonu described the support she got from her teacher in Canada in the school who supported and encouraged her:

She was my best teacher (pointing at the teacher in the photograph). She was Indian and she was really nice. If I did not understand anything in English, she would explain to me and helped me a lot in my studies. She would call me aside and help me so that I could understand English better. We had another teacher, she was also very nice and kids from other background were all in this class and would teach us how to say hello in her own language and she would also learn our language. I wish I had her picture, but I do not have it. . . . If I have problems I talk to counselor in the school . . . what I talk to her it is safe with her. Sometimes it works and sometimes it does not.

Similarly, Gulshan also voiced praises about the helps and support that she received from her teachers in Canada:

They really helped me when I went to high school. . . . I went straight to high school and did not go to junior high. So they helped me [to progress] and they showed me how everything goes, really good teachers.

Individuals in the community also played an important role in the lives of the Afghan refugee children. Azim was very touched by the support he got from his neighbor in Pakistan.

**Neighbor.** “*He [neighbor] was a tailor . . . helped me a lot and told me that I am like his son.*” (Azim)

Azim and his family were tenants of the neighbor who did not have children. While living in Pakistan the neighbor who was non Ismaili played a very important role in Azim’s life:

The neighbor was really nice and he was a shopkeeper, like he was a tailor and he was a nice person too and helped me a lot and told me that I am like his son. He helped me a lot with money stuff. Sometimes he used to call in Eid [celebrations] he would give me Eidi [money]. I can still remember that when I was a kid when I first moved to Pakistan, I did not know anything and that guy, the tailor that I told you about, he used to teach me how to speak Urdu the Pakistani language and stuff like that. . . . I was speaking Urdu so fast that if somebody used to meet me and talk to me they thought Oh! That as if I was born in Pakistan. . . . I was so . . . good in Urdu that I knew everything.

Azim continues to keep in touch with the neighbor by phone. Izzat and Meera shared their experience of having friends who were like a family to them.

**Friends.** “*Like if I had any problems or if I had any questions about those [any] kinds of things, she will find my answer [laughs] for sure.*” (Izzat).

Izzat had *photo conversation* with me about her precious Afghan friend in Pakistan who helped her cope with her daily hassles.

She was [a] close friend of us and [one time] one lady . . . said bad words to us. . . . I was like so mad as to why they are thinking like that . . . we are just standing with our relatives and why they are thinking like that and she [best friend] was like ‘don’t care if you are going to care about everybody then you will not succeed in your life.’ I was like Ok. [laughs]. . . . If I had like any problems or if I had any questions . . . she will find my answer [laughs] for sure. If I was feeling bad then I don’t know from where she appear, she was just coming like in front of me and she was like there. I would ask where did you come from? . . . and she would say, ‘whenever you are feeling sad I am there’ [face lights up and we both laugh]. . . . We were like together we did not hide anything from each other, everything



that was happening in our house or outside when someone was telling us anything. . . . What we should do . . . and everything.

Meera shared photographs of outings with Afghan friends and reflected on the good times with them.

We would like every Friday we had like three families like friend, and we would be going to one house one Friday and next they would come to our house and just kept like going . . . they were all Afghani families . . . just friends . . . but we would be together and we would have lots of fun and they would take us to “West Ed” [Edmonton Mall] and they took us to many places like circus and zoo and places and they took us around city and showed us lots of stuff.

The family connection in the form of friends is considered an important resource to these Afghan children as it provides support and the strength to adapt to new environments (Weine et al., 2004; 2005). This kind of support promotes resilience to face adversity.

### ***Pets as Family Members***

Tayreez and Meera talked about their pets that brought a lot of joy to the family. Both of them shared the experience of death of their pets.

***Dog.*** “*Because no one else was there [at home] and it was just me and Rexy. I did not feel alone.*” (Tayreez)

Tayreez loved her pet dog Rexy who was a companion to her and was very sad that the family had to put him to sleep because he had developed an incurable disease. Tayreez related her fond memories of Rexy:

This picture here [of Rexy] . . . he knew every time the door bell would ring [that] someone was coming and so he would run down the stairs to see who is coming. I loved playing with his hair. And when everyone was at work and I was doing summer school and when I came home he was always waiting for me so it made me feel special I guess. It was just me

and him and so me and him like played together and he made me feel less lonely because no one else was there and it was just me and him. I did not feel alone . . . it was a like a miniature baby I guess, it was like looking after someone other than yourself. I really did not want to put him down I felt so sad. . . . There was something wrong with his knees and the doctor said he could not fix it even if you buy the thing he couldn't fix it and the thing cost 7 grand to buy it and he still could not fix it. He was really really ill like no matter what we did, the doctor said he would die and so we just put it down to take him off his misery [big pause].

I asked, "How did you cope with the loss?" Tayreez responded:

Well! I don't know it took like I think like a month. We [family members] were so depressed. He would always come down and play with us. It was as if like someone died in my family. It was so sad. . . . I remember everyone was like crying . . . Yeah! Even my daddy was missing him and he said 'Oh no! Where is my little puppy?' He would play with my dad in the yard. My dad I guess he is lonely too. He would be there with my dad when everyone else was out of the house.

I questioned further, "So when you look at his picture what kinds of things come to your mind?" Tayreez paused to think and continued to stare at the picture of Rexy and then responded with a lot of passion:

It makes me feel happy and sad like bitter sweet because like he used to be there when no one else was around. But I also remember how every time I wanted to go somewhere I had to stay home and take care of him and now I feel so bad. Because I wanted to go somewhere and someone had to stay back with the dog in case he wants to go in the yard. And then I felt so bad because I wanted to go out but I could not leave him alone. But now I feel so guilty every time I look at the picture like I should have done more like to save him. So that he could have been alive for us till today.

I encouraged Tayreez to verbalize as to what more could she have done as she admitted that she was feeling guilty sometimes. She contemplated her actions and then responded: "I don't know I could have like done something more. I don't know I should have taken him to the vet sooner so that we would know earlier

about the problem [pause] yeah . . .” I wanted to assure her that she did do the right thing so that she could discuss openly about her feelings. So I commented, “But you took him to the vet and that is how you found out what was wrong and you tried to do something.” Tayreez agreed that the family tried all the options that were available but it was still sad that Rexy had to be put to sleep. Rexy had become very close to everyone in the family and so they all grieved the loss together. Tayreez was also happy that there were good times spent with Rexy. She also informed me that she would never get another dog as it would mean that she was replacing Rexy.

**Goldfish.** *“I loved my fish. . . . I was crying like it was my favorite fish and it died for no reason.”* (Meera)

Meera had a Goldfish as a pet and was very upset that the fish died. Unlike Tayreez, Meera went and bought another one very similar to the one that just died so she does not forget. Meera went on to explain in her own voice:

. . . I loved my fish. I had it [since] I moved from my old house in 2003. So just like one week ago we were changing water and [it] . . . died. Because we put the wrong thing, like we did not put the water conditioner and my dad accidentally brought something that was not right. And we did not know what it was. Then I was crying like it was my favorite fish and it died for no reason. So I cried for half an hour or one hour [pause].

I asked: “How did you feel?” Meera responded:

It feels really sad, because it is just like you really lost something and it will never come back. Then we went to the fish shop like pet shop and bought a different fish that looked almost exactly same thing. I did not really want to replace it but I really wanted a fish like him again so I bought the fish that looked exactly the same but this one has a black dot on his nose. I bought the exact one to remind me of that one.

Both the Afghan children experienced sadness when their precious pets died and yet each reacted differently. Children can be alike and yet so different in the way they act and cope with life experiences. Tayreez did not want to get another pet dog as she did not want to replace REXY while Meera replaced her pet goldfish with another one that looked just like the one that died so she could continue to remember. Kaufman and Kaufman (2006) reinforced in their case study research that there is a unique bond between the owner and the pet. In addition, the pets provided companionship, facilitated increased social skills and became part of the family to the children. Tayreez, Meera, and their family members not only supported each other but learned together from the experience of their pet dying, how to cope with the loss. It also promoted family cohesion while giving support to the child during the time of loss.

### **Summary**

It was apparent immediately for these children that family played a significant role in their daily life. The strong sense of family orientation, obligation, and closeness has significant protective effects on all the members of a family and more so, on the children themselves. Thus the family connected by blood or not, is considered central to the Afghans and important to children's survival and adaptation through instilling a sense of strength and serving as a resource. Family provided consistent stability and support in a time of changing countries, landscapes, and family home. This meant adopting various cultures from different earth lands, different languages, environments, and social patterns.

This particular experience of the Afghan refugee children led me to view their world and the Afghan culture from their perspectives. I discuss the importance of the Afghan culture to these children in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TREASURING THE AFGHAN CULTURE

Students [Children] need to have generous and positive access to their heritage culture while also acquiring knowledge of and confidence with the content and codes of mainstream culture. Students [Children] can and have the opportunity to draw freely from both cultures in creatively constructing coherent and integrated social identities. Often, one or neither of them is available. (Ellis, 1999, p. 172)

In this chapter I define culture and identify the general components of culture. I express what components of the Afghan culture are treasured by the refugee children in this study. In addition, I also show how these children are able to treasure their Afghan culture within the Canadian society as well as how they embrace and resist change.

### What Is Culture?

Culture according to the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper, 2001b) comes from the *Latin* word *cultura* which stems from *colere*, meaning “to cultivate.” It also means cultivating the acquired collective intellectual customs by a group of people. For example culture is expressed in the way children make sense of the world. Many of the values of the Afghan culture are expressed in various ways, such as respect for elders, embracing the Afghan dress and dance, and fulfilling family obligations (Dupree, 2002).

The children spoke reverently and joyously about their culture. They also spoke a little about some restrictive aspects of their culture. During my study, I focused on whether culture can cultivate resilience. In addition to cultivating, etymologically culture means to guard and to till the fields. In truth from the way

the children spoke, their culture did have a protective nature and gave them the confidence to explore. They could always depend on this culture to fall back on. But likewise, just like when tilling the ground sometimes we run into rough ground and sometimes drought occurs, the children experienced this side of culture too. Even though they found some aspects of culture to be restrictive and did not want to follow certain norms, they still said they felt guarded by the culture and were confident that they could always fall back on it like a cradle.

According to Doane and Varcoe (2005), the general components of culture are shared values, beliefs, emotions, customs, and a way of life practiced by certain ethnic groups that are passed on to each generation. Understanding the differences and becoming aware of the cultural variations that distinguish the children in this study from others could enhance communication and socialization (Doane & Varcoe, 2005). Eventually, back and forth communication opens a pathway of mutual respect and a consensus for understanding living in multiple cultures that may shape our own view of life.

The children in this study discussed specific components of culture such as dress, dance, language, family time together, gender roles, living between cultures, and integrating within religious culture. They spoke of volunteering as an integral part of their culture. Below are the children's voices as parts of the text to show their *photo conversations*. I also summarize and clarify certain aspects of treasuring the Afghan culture.

### **Culture Stories of Afghan Children**

*“I do not want to forget my [Afghan] culture [because] that is part of my identity just like my name.” (Meera)*

Meera voices the importance of maintaining the Afghan culture while making a new home on the shores of Canada. Throughout the photo conversations, I found myself going wherever the children led me. We talked about the Afghan dress when they shared a picture of themselves or their family members wearing the cultural outfit. What do clothes mean? Do they cover who we are or show who we are? The children alleged that embracing the cultural dress on different occasions was one way of maintaining the Afghan culture. According to Dupree (2002), Afghans usually observe modesty in dressing and the patterned embroidery dress exhibits not only an art but also a distinct feature of ethnic identity. In addition, it also displays an individual’s identity, economic and social status, changing socio-political trends, and stages in an individual’s life cycle.

#### ***The Cultural Dress and Dance***

*“I like wearing that dress . . . [this is] one way of not forgetting my culture.” (Meera)*

The children stressed the importance of wearing the Afghan dress as a way of continuing to remember their Afghan culture. Wearing the Afghan dress on festive occasions gave them a sense of belonging to the community. Therefore, it was vital to own the Afghan dress. Those who did not currently have the dress due to growing out of it treasured their photograph in the Afghan dress. Being too



small for them, did not in any way affect their cherishing of the dress. Below are the voices of the children that show the joys of embracing the cultural dress.

Meera showed me her newly acquired Afghan dress and explained with a glow on her face that:

This time I actually got to choose my own. Last time it was my parents' decision . . . Yeah! I like wearing the [Afghan] dress because I do not want to forget my culture and that helps and that is one way of not forgetting my culture. Like some people they feel shy or they feel embarrassed. . . . I actually like wearing those clothes. It's a bit too heavy but it's not that bad and it's really pretty and it's just the way of me participating in my culture and stuff like I don't want to forget it.

Meera enjoys owning the cultural dress because she gets invited to dance to the tune of the Afghani music in front of the guests during Afghan weddings. Although in the past few decades music and dance have suffered from the condemnation by orthodox religious establishment, they have always been deeply embedded features in the Afghan culture (Dupree, 2002). As mentioned by Meera, on happy occasions, like engagements and weddings, Afghans enjoy themselves best by engaging in a set of ceremonial performances including music, dance and cultural dress. Meera explicated:

I wear my Afghani clothes on special occasions [when] there are dances during weddings and they [families of the wedding couple] tell us to wear those dresses. So that is one way and I do not want to forget my culture and I really like wearing it.

Gulshan also purchased a new dress during her visit to Afghanistan so that she could wear it when participating in dancing on special occasions. With joy, Gulshan shared her photograph and explained to me: "Here is my picture with the

group when we were dancing.” She added with great pride that, “the dress represents our country and I can wear it to weddings and special nights” in Canada to perform the special Afghan dance. Lingis (2008) writes of the power of dancing where all dancing or watching receive the joy of it. He also states that a sense of splendor comes from a dance. Splendor etymologically means brilliance, bright. But there is also a sense of bearing pain in the notion of splendor. Dancers often bear pain from the physical movements and the trinkets that are part of the costume and they must not show this pain to the crowd. After dancing often whatever strife and discord was present before the dance is replaced by a sense of joy and a sense of achievement and splendor in the culture results. It may also be a pathway to promote resilience.

Although Izzat owned the Afghan dress, she did not have her own picture in the cultural dress but having a *photo conversation* about it was important to her. She presented her younger brother’s picture with him dressed in a typical Afghan dress for males. Izzat stressed the importance of embracing their culture to feel connected with the community while living in Canada. This is how she expressed it:

Yeah! This is my brother’s picture and I stole it from him because I like it very much in [our] cultural dress. When there is Khusyiali [festive occasion] there is no difference about where is she from? Or where is he from? We are like altogether, we are getting so happy, and till 2 o’clock we are playing dance and telling them [music players] more! Please more!

Afghans consider dancing as an integral part of rejoicing on religious or national feast days, and particularly at weddings as mentioned before. The dance

is performed in a circle to the Afghan music and the drumming, which is increased in tempo, hints to the dancers to respond to the rhythm. Normally the audience will handclap with exclamatory sounds to encourage the dancers (British Council Afghanistan, 2004). It is an honor to be able to perform in front of an audience. Dancing on special occasions also gives the Afghan refugee children in this study a sense of pride, social inclusion, belonging to the community and building more networks: networks that might one day be protective.

The picture of the brother in the Afghan dress jolted Izzat's memory and gave her an opportunity to talk about how she was able to get her Afghan dress and when she plans to wear it. This is how she explains:

Like the Afghani clothes, yeah! [With a glow on her face] I have it. My cousin had gone to Afghanistan and she bought it for me. If there is wedding or I have to dance then I will sure wear it but not normally. It is so heavy. In wedding we have a circle dance and it is a little bit different and so we are wearing it. For example if it is my brother or sister's wedding like near relative or a good friend then I will wear [Afghan dress because] I have to dance.

Tayreez did not own an Afghan dress and so she cherished the picture of her siblings and herself in the Afghan dress when they first came to Canada. She explained how her mother had dressed them that way at a Canadian friend's birthday party. She further elaborated that, "it kind of reminded me how we were maintaining our culture through our clothes in a western society. Even though we were in Canada my mom still dressed us in these clothes." When asked why is it important to wear the Afghan dress? Tayreez responded: "It is still important because [my friends in Canada] would know [about] our culture."

Owning the Afghan dress remained important to Tayreez, Sonu and Azim as well but it seemed that they did not have one that fit them well at present.

Those that had family members visiting Afghanistan or Pakistan were lucky to acquire a new cultural dress but others had to learn different ways to treasure the Afghan culture.

Tayreez voiced her distress about her mother giving away her Afghan dress:

I do not even know what my mom did with that. I still wanted it because it showed me something from back home like I was so young when I came here I don't know anything else about it as to what she did with those clothes.

Sonu was content to keep her baby picture in the Afghan dress in her bedroom as she did not own a dress. This is how she explained: "It just reminds me more because I don't have many clothes like this anymore." Azim planned to wear both western and eastern clothes depending on the type of festive occasions. He is also concerned that the Afghan dress that he has at present is too small for him and he will need another one soon. Azim is hoping that a relative visiting Pakistan or Afghanistan will bring one for him.

Farooq is the only one who did not have a photo conversation about the Afghan dress. I wondered why. Is it because he did not have a picture of himself in his cultural dress or is it because he had other important things to talk about? I think it was both. We see above how honest Izzat was about stealing a photo of her brother because she did not have her own picture in the traditional dress.

Fan (2008) explains how the Chinese dress culturally articulates the interchange between traditional dressing and modernization, east and west. In addition, in Chinese history, clothes give identity to an individual, implying a sense of belonging to a certain group, as well as political commitment. Similarly, the Afghan dress was considered important by the children as it gave them an identity and an opportunity to participate fully in various festivities. In addition to acquiring and wearing the cultural dress during different occasions, the Afghan refugee children in this study voiced the importance of not forgetting their mother tongue of Farsi/Persian language as another way to treasure the Afghan culture.

### ***The Farsi Language***

Dari is the Afghan dialect of Farsi (Persian) which is spoken by 50% of the Afghans and considered as one of the two official spoken languages in the country. The other official language is Pashto spoken by 35% of the population. There are several other minor dialects spoken in Afghanistan but Dari has been formalized for use in Royal courts. Many of the Afghans are also bilingual (CIA, 2009).

Some of the Afghan children were very young when they came to Canada. All of them passed through Pakistan before migrating to Canada. Living in Pakistan required them to learn Urdu as it is the national language of Pakistan. Later when they came to Canada it was mandatory for them to learn the English language to be able to survive. Although learning a different language was a challenge they realized that they were able to communicate and understand the

people they met from various backgrounds. They also voiced that maintaining their own language of Farsi (Dari) was a challenge while living in Canada.

These children may not realize that there are also other benefits of being bilingual or multilingual. According to the literature review done by Stewart (2005) “ research shows that foreign language study improves cognitive abilities, positively influences achievement in other disciplines, and results in higher achievement scores, especially when study of a second language begins in the elementary school years” (p. 11). This invaluable knowledge if communicated to children could encourage them to maintain their national language. It also has implications for educators and program planning and policy makers. One might extrapolate this literature and qualitative findings, to reinforce that retaining one’s language may be of critical importance to sustaining resilience. The language is also a way of keeping their original identity, while the mother tongue continually nourishes them. Communicating with Elders and others requires maintenance of their mother tongue.

During photo conversations, I observed that all the participants in this study conversed in Farsi at home with their parents, grandparents, siblings and relatives. Meera was the only one who spoke passionately about maintaining the Afghan culture by communicating in Farsi. This is how she expressed it: “At home I speak my language. That’s another way of not forgetting my culture. I don’t want to forget my culture anyhow and so I speak my language Farsi at home.”

It was not acceptable for Meera that her cousins had forgotten to communicate in the Afghan language. It may be that for Meera Farsi language had meaning as a dwelling place or home. At home people speak in a particular way with each other as language provides a medium for bringing the nature of things into the open and also living with others (Winning, 1991). Friedman et al. (2003) explicate that, “communication is embedded within a matrix of beliefs and behavior patterns, many of which are culturally derived” (p. 281). It means that without the language, the matrix has holes in it, which cannot be fixed. Some of the participants in this study cherished upholding their mother language along with other languages learnt, as part of their communication, to express their cultural identity. Meera explicates that:

Well uhm! Like . . . my cousins and them, they don't know any Farsi at all. They speak in English at home and everything is in English and they have sort of forgotten how to speak Farsi. . . . But I do not want to forget it. Actually some people when I speak Farsi and they say that “Wow you still remember Farsi” and I have been here for about 8-9 years and I am like Yeah! I remember because I do not want to forget it. Like some of them have come only 4 years ago and they have forgotten it totally, they don't know Farsi. Like when I say something to them in Farsi and they go like “what did you say?” It is not that they are very young, some of them are like 14 or 15 years and they have forgotten Farsi like totally . . . Yeah! I speak Farsi with my parents, like my family members and my relatives. So mostly at home I speak Farsi and then at school I speak in English with my friends.

Above, Meera proudly identifies how she manages to maintain her national language in addition to learning English. As these children show, in communicating with friends and colleagues they gain a feeling of competence in trying different things. They may be motivated to learn computers or a musical

instrument. Competence also leads to self-confidence and anticipation of success in the future. It enhances self-esteem and self-concept. Competence, self-esteem and self-concept are three vital ingredients of deep mind-body connections enabling an individual to learn life skills that are valuable in becoming more resilient (Siebert, 2005).

Language is one medium by which Meera gains confidence within herself and preserves her cultural identity. Treasuring the Afghan culture through dress, dance, music, and language were strategies identified by the Afghan refugee children as ways to preserve their culture and group identity. Maintaining the Afghan culture gives them an opportunity to relate to each other as coming from the same country. Cultural identity also promotes social unity (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007; His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008).

### ***Family Time as a Way of Being Together***

In Afghanistan and Pakistan there was ample time with family members as everyone in the family did not work. All members of the family were at home in the evenings and they were able to spend time together every day as well as visit the extended family. Visiting each other was not an issue as they all stayed within walking distance. In Canada everyone in the family has to work and they all do different shifts and more than one job. These irregular timings of work negatively affect spending family quality time together. Azim feels the tension of not having enough time to spend with parents and family members because of economic reasons. He explains that,



life [in Canada is different], I meet my parents . . . when I come after school, we go to Khane [Prayer house] and stay two hours there and then after 8 pm we all go to bed and then get up in the morning, go to school and come back and you get kind of bored doing the same thing over and over again. . . . My dad gets up at 4 o'clock [in the morning] and then up to 6-7 o'clock [in the evening] almost all hours of his day that he works, then about 6-7 hours he sleeps . . . this routine is boring [and difficult to accept].

Azim does not see his parents in the morning when he goes to school as his parents have already left for work. When Azim was explaining about the lack of family time, his dad explained that it has become necessary for everyone to work in Canada due to economic reasons. Immigrant parents of Bosnian families who have migrated to America also spoke of having less family time due to family members having conflicting schedules at work (Weine et al., 2004).

Tayreez talked about being lonely at home because everyone went to work and more so in the summer time. Meera being the only child lamented about her relatives living outside of Canada and the ones living in the same city could not visit as frequently because of the distance and time constraints. Meera described her feelings about not being able to see her family as often as she would like to:

Here every time they [family members] are busy with school, work and jobs and stuff. I don't really see my cousin much. There [in Pakistan], I would see my uncle, cousin, everybody like once a day. Here it is like once a month sometimes. It gets like really boring here [in Canada].

I observed during photo conversation with Sonu that she had the responsibility of looking after her younger siblings when she came back from school as both her parents went to work. The mother had already prepared dinner and she was also going to school to upgrade her skills to get a better paying job.

These children are used to having their extended family either living with them or at a walking distance as stated above. Approaching the family at any time when in need was not an issue and so the feeling of loneliness never entered into their cognition while living in Afghanistan or in the transitional shore of Pakistan. Therefore feeling alone or lonely in Canada is a challenging and difficult emotion to deal with for these children. They must develop new skills and alternate strategies for the loss of the extended family.

Daly (1996) has done an extensive review of literature on how the family time is affected in a busy culture. He affirms that family time spent together is also highly valued in the western culture and that, “ideologically, it represents a set of beliefs about the primary importance of good parenting and family togetherness as the foundation of a stable society” (Daly, p. 117). Moreover, “to invest time in the family is to invest in the next generation so as to ensure a solid future for society” (p. 117). However, to put this into action in this day and age is very challenging. The problem with time that Azim related above, not seeing his parents when he goes to school, could be related to the tension of forced individual scheduled-living in the new world. It has become a necessity to relieve financial stress and unfortunately time has taken “its place next to money as source of strain, tension, and conflict” (p. 119). We have allowed unwittingly external time pressures of earning a living to erode our family time. Can we retrieve family time before it is too late? Is it already too late?

To try and compensate for being lonely and not having extended families close by, Afghan parents in this study have tried to create opportunities to be with the family even for a little while. In regard to child rearing practices, these parents intend to assure that their children receive the skills and attitudes needed to survive in the world. But, in order to provide the necessities of life, both parents most often have to work long hours (Friedman et al., 2003). This paradox of parenting poses difficulties for parents who often do not have alternative choices.

The children talked about family gatherings in their home, picnics, camping, and traveling to another city in Alberta on some weekends or longer visits to Ontario, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Only two children were able to travel overseas. Sonu explains how her family members have tried to cherish the culture of being together by finding time to go out, and by doing things together:

We drive to Vancouver sometimes; we went camping before with my other family members. It is usually my dad's side because my mom's side is more in [another city] . . . My dad's sister, my grandpa's sister and brother, his uncle and my grandpa's brother's kids and just other cousins. Like they are not my cousins but we just call them cousins, because they are not that close, but just that . . . I guess we could say that they are closer because they are his [dad's] cousins. They all came camping with us too and it was fun.

Spending family time together is not something new for these children. Gulshan shared a photo of her family when they lived in Afghanistan during times of peace. She enthusiastically shared how they always collectively went for outings. For example, visiting the parks and going to the shopping markets on a regular basis were most common. They always looked forward to these family outings, as it was a pleasure to meet the family and a joy to do things together.

For these children migration to a new country strongly includes a nostalgic “memory not only of country, language, sounds, or smells, but also memory about relationships” (Falicov, 2007, p. 160)

Having a meal together was a cherished family time but in Canada it has become very difficult as someone is always working. As a result, these children who have never felt lonely before are now experiencing profound loneliness since arriving in Canada. They long for their extended family members and their experience of living close to them. These members were very present in their conversations. Thus migration affects generations of children and grandchildren of immigrants (Falicov, 2007) in many faceted ways and lasts a long time.

The family plays a vital role in being aware of time and how to pace it in order to give sufficient time to these children. They know this is needed to help the children understand the world in which they live. Their belief is that creating an awareness of time within the children is important so that they can structure their lives positively.

### ***Gender***

Gender roles modeled within the family also shape children’s understanding of the amount of time spent at home contributing to different chores. Gender roles are socially constructed for men and women by a particular society (Friedman, et al., 2003). Azim shared how being a girl in the Afghan culture puts more stress on his sisters. Therefore he felt that asking for help from

his sisters for his studies would be placing more responsibility on them and that would not be fair. This is what he explained:

Like if you are an Afghan girl, you have to do many stuff at home rather than study first, because that is what comes first, like if people learn the background of what is Afghan peoples' model . . . [girls do] all the work at home [first] and then study, it is like kind of hard.

Azim's grandmother was sitting in the living room while I was having a photo conversation with him. She relayed the information to me through Azim that in Afghanistan they have lots of children. The mother does not go outside of the home to work and the children do all the work to help their parents. In Canada, however due to the economic conditions, everyone has to work. Therefore, the grandmother's role in Canada is to cook for the family as both of Azim's parents go to work and the children go to school. The information provided by Azim illustrates that social roles and expectations may be derived from a unique set of cultural values (Dupree, 2002; Friedman et al., 2003). However, when migrating to a different country, those social cultural roles and expectations need to be modified to meet the needs of the family.

Afghanistan is a patriarchal society and the status of women is central to these values (Dupree, 2002). As mentioned by Azim, the roles assigned are gender specific and the girl children or females of the families are responsible for household responsibilities. Among Afghan families it did not matter if the boy child was young or old it seems that the role of protector was normally allocated to the males and doing chores in the home to the females. This is the reason why a male was always expected to accompany a female in Afghanistan when stepping

out of the home. This was very apparent during my *photo conversations* with the Afghan children. However, Farooq truly believes that dish washing is a chore that should be done by girls. This is based on his observation and as demonstrated by his mother and father.

When working in Afghanistan and talking to my Afghan friends about gender roles, it became evident that the male members generally contribute to family economic welfare. In addition, they perform disciplinary roles within the family as well as caring for aged parents throughout their lives. The female plays a nurturing role within the family including socialization of children even if she has a professional career and is working outside the home. This gender role modeling within the Afghan families contributes to the perpetuation of patriarchal values. I have also observed these roles during the *photo conversations* with the Afghan children in this study. I noted how much the grandmother was respected and these grandchildren were concerned about her well being.

Azim felt very sad for his grandmother as not only is she alone at home all day but also isolated from other family members due to geographical distance. His grandmother is unable to venture out alone as she may get lost and cannot communicate in English to get back home safely. Afghans are very family-oriented people and fulfilling family obligations and respecting elders is highly valued (Dupree, 2003). Many children like Azim may experience conflict due to changing traditional roles of their grandparents as their mothers are increasingly becoming bread winners. Participants in this study ensured that their

grandmothers had an opportunity to go out in the evenings for prayers or shopping once they were back from school or work. They also kept in touch with their grandparents during the day by telephone to ensure that they were safe at home.

### *Living between Cultures*

The children also voiced the challenges of living between cultures and how they managed to embrace both cultures. Since Gulshan visited Afghanistan in the summer of 2006, she was able to compare living in Afghanistan with that of living in Canada. I asked, “What difference did you find? What did you like and not like?” She responded:

It is hard to live there and the weather is not good [in the summer] I think . . . and because I have to wear scarf and long sleeves all that stuff and cover my hair and it was very hot, Here [in Canada] when it is hot we can wear shorts and short sleeves [laughs].

Gulshan has integrated into both the Afghan and the Canadian culture. She adapts depending on what is considered acceptable dressing. Friedman et al. (2003) label this process of one culture or ethnic group gradually adapting to the traits of another dominant culture (Canadian) as acculturation. Gulshan voiced pleasure in embracing the Canadian way of dressing in the summer time and this was obvious from the pictures that she presented during photo conversation. She had covered herself in Afghanistan according to the Afghan culture as described above. However when she had to change planes in Dubai to come to Canada, she changed into jeans and a short sleeve top and there was no cover on her head. It

looks on the surface that she exchanges one culture for the other with a change of clothes, but she does not feel this way.

It appears that Canadian culture exerted a great influence on Gulshan when she returned to Canada from Afghanistan. The outcome of acculturation may lead to assimilation where by the ethnic culture may practically extinguish and get absorbed into the other dominant culture (Bacallo & Smokowski, 2007; Friedman et al., 2003). Although it was not evident from the study participants, assimilation may become a cause of cultural conflict in the family at some point in time, particularly if there are differences in family members speed or interest in assimilating or acculturating. Therefore being aware of differences among family members with regards about preserving the Afghan identity and culture as well as embracing the new culture is important.

Reflecting on the findings from the *photo conversations*, it is evident that the Afghan children in this study like to adhere to their culture along with adapting to the dominant culture. This process of maintaining two cultural systems or two sets of behavior signifies biculturalism. To find ways to balance their cultural values through biculturalism is an important adaptive strategy (Friedman et al., 2003). Afghan children initially face an additional challenge of integrating into the mainstream Canadian Shia Imami Ismaili [religious] community subculture.

The Ismaili community residing in Canada is culturally diverse and comprised predominantly of people of East African and Indo-Pakistani origins.



The cultural practices of this group are somewhat different than those of Afghan origin. The challenge therefore is for these children to somehow preserve their own Afghan identity, develop a Canadian identity, and integrate within their religious community in Canada.

### ***Integrating within Religious Community Culture***

According to the guidance of the spiritual leader, the Canadian Ismaili community facilitates cultural preservation through encouraging and respecting ways of dressing. For example, the Ismaili community elders in Edmonton, Canada adopted the Afghan dress for the festival of Navroz (New Year). This was a powerful acceptance and respect for the Afghan culture. There are also special days of the year when there are religious celebrations through a night of singing devotional literature known as *Ginans* from the Indo-Pakistani tradition. In addition, *Qasidas* are recited on the same night as an acknowledgement of the devotional practices of the Afghan people to promote pluralism within the Ismaili community.

The community also celebrates certain festivals through dance. The Indo-Pakistan and Afghan tradition involves dancing in large groups as Meera, Izzat, and Gulshan spoke about earlier. But here, they do not just dance their own cultural dances; they learn the dances of others and in a way, this integration of cultural dances contributes to their well-being. Therefore, at festivals, music from various traditions is played and community members from diverse ethnic backgrounds dance together. These kinds of celebrations are arranged to facilitate

social inclusion including western dance such as the *Bird Dance*. Fortunately, Canada is an example of a pluralistic society that values and respects cultural practices of communities from all different backgrounds and faiths (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008). The festivals facilitate bringing people from different cultures together and this participation in the festival evokes in the children a sense of belonging and integrating into other cultures as well.

### **The Canadian Ismailis**

All the Afghani refugee children in this study reside in Canada and are Ismaili Muslims as mentioned in the previous chapter. Among other things, the Imam embraces diversity as a way of enhancing the welfare of humanity and allowing the individual groups to maintain their cultural identity (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008). Another unique way through which these Afghan children integrated within their religious culture was volunteering.

### **Volunteering as a Way of Social Inclusion**

The children felt that they needed to give something back to society and talked extensively about volunteer work. In this study volunteering is defined as a person participating in organized Ismaili community activities in various capacities and there is no monetary payment directly or indirectly by the community.

Volunteer service is an essential part of living in Islam. The Afghan refugee children in this study volunteered in the Jamatkhana space to serve their community members in diverse ways. According to Princess Zahra Aga Khan

(1998), the daughter of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, volunteerism actualizes “Islams ethics of inclusiveness, of compassion, of sharing, of the respect for life, and of personal responsibility for sustaining a healthy physical, social and cultural environment . . . generosity of material resources, of time, of thought, and of knowledge” (¶ 3.). Volunteering for the Afghan children in this study facilitated networking with the community members and gave them a lot of satisfaction within their being. Below I describe some ways in which these children volunteered.

While I was having a *photo conversation* with Izzat I observed that her father was rushing to leave the home although he had just come from work. Izzat informed me that her father volunteers to drive the community van twice a week to take the seniors and other Ismaili community members who do not have transportation to attend Jamatkhana for prayers. In addition, the whole family volunteers and makes an extra effort to clean the Jamatkhana once a week. Volunteering action is considered to enhance the psychological sense of community which in turn contributes to a spirit of belongingness and community togetherness (Haski-Leventhal, Ben-Arieh., & Melton, 2008; Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007). In addition, when community members are involved in community service on a regular basis in their day to day life, it may “bring the professional concept of volunteerism from being a good adherent to organizational demands to being a good citizen and indeed a good neighbour” (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008, p. 152). Here, most of the research participants

engaged in various Jamatkhana activities on different days of the week on a regular basis. When on duty, these children are required to wear a uniform, which is a symbol of pride for them.

Izzat shared her picture with her friend wearing an official Ismaili

Volunteer Corps (IVC) uniform and this is what she related:

I chose this picture because I am feeling so proud to wear this volunteer uniform because we are doing ‘seva’ [voluntary work]. . . . Wednesday it is cleaning day in the [prayer place]. Then we took a picture and we were tired. I am feeling so proud that we are doing ‘seva’ and making our Imam (spiritual leader) happy and helping our JAMAT [religious community] and they are getting happy from us sometimes because we are giving them water and giving ‘chai’ [tea] to them or we are bringing chair for them and sometimes we are cleaning and washing dishes and then . . . it’s a kind of getting a new relationship too.

Azim also shared his picture of volunteering in the Jamatkhana space on the shores of Canada and explained what he does and why is it important for him to volunteer:

Every Wednesday is my job to vacuum inside the JK or in any other area and then during Khusyiali (festive occasion) I vacuum the social hall because people eat there and it becomes so messy and so I help out there too. . . . I don’t know actually why I feel like doing it. It gives me a feeling like *I just want to do it. Doing it [ helping] makes me happy but I don’t know how. It is just a weird feeling.*

I wondered how Azim got involved doing volunteer work and so I probed him to talk more about it. He explained that:

I love doing it like [in] Pakistan I never got the chance because it was so expensive buying the clothes [uniform]. So for me this person in JK, [in Canada] bought the clothing for me like the uniform because I wanted so much and I used to work in the home clothing (casual wear). Back then I could not wear uniform but I used to help and he asked me if I wanted to be a volunteer. Yeah! [I wanted to], but the problem with the clothing

[uniform] and he bought it for me. That is how I started like from two years ago.

Gulshan shared her photograph in a volunteer uniform serving soft drinks to the Ismaili community members. She shared with joy that:

This is the volunteer job I did in Khushyiali for 7-8 hours. . . . I am giving water and coke to everyone. When I was serving, an old gentleman came to me and told me to give him my hand and he gave me a small picture of Hazar Imam [spiritual leader] and told me that I was doing a very good job....I was very happy.

The Afghan children voiced the pride they felt in serving the community and being a part of the volunteering group. This Islamic ethic of volunteering is ingrained from childhood. This is what probably led the Afghan refugee children to contribute to the community in their own way. With the same intention of service some of the community members volunteered to offer tutorials to the Afghan refugee children so that they could progress and make a future for themselves.

Given their recent history of living in a war-torn nation of Afghanistan and then going to Pakistan as refugees, their arrival in Canada has given them the stability and an opportunity to reflect and the desire to contribute to society in a positive way through volunteer work. The Afghan children shared their photos on volunteering for different occasions with excitement. These children volunteered during festivals helping to set up the facility, serving food or drinks and to clean up at the end of the festivities. This is a new cultural norm for them and provides the opportunity to return to the society in whatever way they can for what they

receive from others. Haski-Leventhal et al. (2008) received similar responses from the participants who were interviewed in their study. In my study volunteerism also provides spaces of opportunity to be a part of the community.

### **Summary**

These Afghan children demonstrated embracing their Afghan culture while at the same time integrating freely into the new culture with the support of their family by participating in social activities (Ellis, 1999). The family time together facilitated cherishing their Afghan culture and giving time to volunteering facilitated integrating into the Ismaili culture in Canada. They retained their mother tongue Farsi and also learnt the English language to survive in the new world.

Dupree (2003) very eloquently describes the cultural heritage of Afghans by explicating that Afghans can be readily recognized as distinct as they adhere strongly to their cultural values and remain true to the essence of their culture. Though the nation is traumatized by war and conflict “the culture still lives” (p. 985) in their heart and through action. This is also true for the participants in this study, as expressed by them in their love and respect for their language, their family, their dress, their dance, and other values such as volunteering. It also builds confidence within them to enable them to create opportune spaces to dwell in Pakistan and Canada, which I discuss in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: CREATING OPPORTUNE SPACES TO DWELL

Notice how each particle moves. Notice how everyone has just arrived here from a journey. Notice how each wants a different food . . . Look at this cup that can hold the ocean [of opportunity]. (Rumi; as cited in Ewing, 2005, p. 306)

The above quote is written by Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi - better known as Rumi who was the-13th-century mystical Muslim scholar, philosopher and poet (Haviland, 2007). The metaphor of “this cup that can hold the ocean” used by Rumi makes us think of the spaces available for the Afghan children in this study as a cup of opportunity that holds their future. This chapter is devoted first, to understanding spaces to dwell and why they are opportune. I present how these spaces occur in the transitional country of Pakistan and in the final destination country of Canada from the perspective of the Afghan children. I also integrate the literature available in various sources and my lived experience to further explicate the spaces of opportunity. I discuss how the building spaces of the school and the Jamatkhana as well as the spaces under the vast universe facilitate the Afghan children in creating their own spaces of opportunity to dwell. I also discuss the challenges and tensions of dwelling the children encountered and how they went about addressing some of them.

### **What Are the Opportune Spaces to Dwell?**

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary the term opportunity in *French* is *opportinite* and in *Latin* it is *opportunitas*, which stems from *opportunus* meaning *favorable time*. The favorable winds *bringing to the harbor*,

derived from the phrase *ob potum veniens*, meaning anyone who seeks out to gain from adverse circumstances (Harper, 2001c). This creates a picture in my mind of the Afghan refugee children and their families being carried by protective winds from the prevailing circumstances of war in their country to a safe harbor. The winds could also turn unfavorable within the harbor and cause the children lots of tension that could prevent them from moving forward in life. The timely and favorable winds on the shores of Pakistan and Canada both provided vast spaces of opportunity as well as challenges or tension under the limitless sky to yet another set of life experiences for these children. In each of these spaces offered, the children learned to live again. These challenges of constantly moving to new spaces are described and analyzed in order to understand how opportune spaces occur in order to dwell in them.

### **How Does Dwelling Occur?**

According to Martin Heidegger (1971) the old English and German word to dwell or *buan* is to live. This act of dwelling is done in a building or *bauen* space. However, *buan* is also connected with *bauen* and so both words originally mean to dwell. In addition, *bauen* also means to “cherish and protect, to preserve and care” (p. 147). Although these actions of *bauen* relate to the cultivation of land with plants and fruits, in the broader sense it relates to how human beings or mortals such as you and I dwell on earth. Thus far, *bauen* is telling us three things. First, building equates to dwelling; second, dwelling is an action by which mortals live on earth; and third, “building as dwelling unfolds into the building



that cultivates growing things and building that erects building” (p. 148).

Therefore, one needs the other; that is dwelling needs shelter and building needs people to learn how to dwell in the space.

Heidegger (1971) continues and asks, “But in what does the nature of dwelling consist?” (p. 148). He answers by referring to the Gothic *wunian*, meaning peace is brought to beings, by reflecting on *dwelling* holistically. Therefore, beings in their dwelling are the way that mortals live on the earth. However, dwelling “on the earth” is also living “under the sky” and both also mean “remaining before the divinities” including “belonging of men’s being to one another” (p. 149). Finally, “by a *primal* oneness the four-earth and sky, divinities and mortals-belong together in one” and taking into consideration “this simple oneness of the four we call the *fourfold*” (p. 149). Therefore, dwelling spaces safeguard the fourfold by connecting it to things. For example, a bridge with two ends, is considered a thing and because it is built in a certain location, it gathers the fourfold to its site, allowing spaces or room for living and connecting for the mortals to form and live in the presence of divinities. So dwelling and building come together in the bridge. In addition, thinking is facilitated through dwelling and building.

Van Lennep (1987) describes how humans honor their places of dwelling by creating an intimacy of living within a room even when in a temporary space like the hotel room. He further makes reference to the atmosphere of a house or dwelling and how some smells and furniture or fixtures give a feeling of

familiarity or alienation. Just thinking about that location of the hotel room gets us from our present site to the site of the hotel room. The Afghan children in this study are building spaces to live but are also continually reminded of the spaces they left. “Man’s relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inhered in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken” (Heidegger 1971, p. 157).

The children as mortals identify dwelling in buildings and varied spaces on earth, which is located under the sky and within the divinities in order to be able to connect with each other, their families and the community. Therefore, the Afghan refugee children without being fully aware dwell in the *fourfold*. These children dwelled in the transitional spaces until they reached their final port in Canada. After facing calamity, diverse spaces provided a new beginning or opportunities, central to the living experiences of these children. Below, I describe the dwelling spaces of opportunity from the perspectives of the children themselves in the transitional country of Pakistan.

### **Transitional Spaces in Pakistan**

#### ***Background for Transitional Spaces***

The Afghan families fit the criteria of refugee status. However, to fall within the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR], 2001) and to seek asylum as refugees, they have to be outside their war-torn country of Afghanistan as well as outside the potential host country, which in this case, is Canada. Many Afghan refugees sought asylum in

neighboring countries, mainly in Pakistan and Iran, which have common boundaries with Afghanistan. The children in this study along with their families went to Pakistan. The following information relating to the process of seeking asylum and settlement in Pakistan was provided by M. Manji (personal communication, June 01, 2008), a senior program officer of the Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) Program office in Moscow, Russia.

Pakistan was not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention for Refugees and therefore its government did not provide any support to the Afghan refugees. Therefore, the UNHCR provided support to Afghan refugees in Pakistan. FOCUS Pakistan, an affiliated humanitarian institution of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), was established in collaboration with the Ismaili Community and in conjunction with UNHCR in Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Karachi which are three major cities of Pakistan to support Afghan refugees.

***Peshawar transit center.*** FOCUS established a transit center in Peshawar, a city near the Afghan border. Ismaili refugees arriving in Peshawar across the Torkham were welcomed at this transit center. They were provided shelter, food, clothes, medicine and other necessities for a few days. Thereafter, travel arrangements were made to transport them by train to Karachi.

***Rawalpindi.*** Some of the Afghan families who had left Afghanistan earlier and settled in the Rawalpindi area (a city close to Peshawar) were allowed to join their friends and relatives in Rawalpindi. There were no transit centers in Rawalpindi and therefore, through Ismaili institutions, these refugees were

provided the necessary help and assistance to settle in the Rawalpindi area, which included finding suitable housing and jobs. In addition, children were enrolled in Afghan academies set up for Afghan children's education, including instruction in the English language.

***Karachi transit center.*** Karachi has the largest Ismaili community in Pakistan. There are a number of community institutions in Karachi, such as the Aga Khan Councils, Education Services, Health Boards, Social Welfare Boards, to name but a few that provided appropriate services to these refugees. In Karachi, FOCUS established five transit centers. In these centers each refugee family was given a reasonable-sized area (partitioned by thick fabric for privacy), toshaks (sitting/sleeping mats), blankets, clothes, etc. There were clinics in each transit center with doctors, nurses, medicines, beds, etc., for sick refugees. There were prayer houses and classrooms for teaching Urdu (the national language of Pakistan) to adults in order to prepare them to work in Pakistan. Some were also given training and materials for making shawls and other garments for women in order to earn an income. Children were enrolled in Aga Khan Schools as well as in other public schools.

There were kitchens for cooking meals and common dining areas for all refugees to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. Refugees worked in kitchens as cooks. Outside the kitchens there were teapots providing tea all the time and water fountains for clean drinking water. Each transit center had an administrator and other workers to ensure efficient operation of the center and to maintain order and

cleanliness. After a stay of three months or so in a transit center, having learned the Urdu language and having received orientation on the job market in Karachi as well as job search techniques, each refugee family was moved to an apartment in the Ismaili housing colonies established in the neighborhood. All employable members of the family were helped in finding jobs to support themselves. They became part of the mainstream Ismaili community, participating in all social and religious festivals and living a normal life. This process helped refugees to be self-sufficient and to live a dignified life. Also, room was created for newly arrived refugees in the transit centers (M. Manji, personal communication, June 01, 2008).

### ***Transitional Dwelling Space***

Having understood the process of the Afghan refugee settlement in transitional centers in Pakistan it is important to discuss the Afghan refugee children in this study who dwelled in the transitional spaces. Five of the participants in this study lived in Rawalpindi and two in Karachi. The nature of the dwelling allowed these children with their families to live in the *fourfold*, including being safe and nurtured (Heidegger, 1971).

The children described that their placement into rental units as well organized by the Ismaili community of Pakistan. For example, Azim explicated that:

Like you know as soon as we come there [Pakistan] we had the *houses*, like I never have seen people in Rawalpindi [Pakistan] living in camps, like paying every people like to help them grow up their life. That was very good; people built up their life very quickly, like people got jobs so

fast in there. If they needed to like make life you know when people just moved from Afghanistan, there was war and people did not bring their stuff and the Aga Khan people gave clothing, shelter, food and many supplies.

Providing the Afghan refugee children and their families with a place to live facilitated them to dwell peacefully with constant love and affection from their parents and family members. The challenge and tension involved in looking for a place to live in a new country was avoided. It gave the children a safe place they could call home from which they could venture to dwell in the fourfold (Heidegger, 1971). These Afghan refugee children and their families fled for safety from their war-torn country and, although they did not voice it, they probably had to live in constant fear of being harassed by the police and put in prison due to their illegal status in Pakistan (Punjani, 2002). Being provided with a dwelling space and with some basic needs such as food and clothing gave the Afghan children and their families a safe haven and some thinking space to strategize for their future livelihoods. Although living in Pakistan was transitional, none of them knew for sure as to when they would receive the official permission to enter the shores of Canada. Therefore, the transitional dwelling in Pakistan for them was a permanent space in which to dwell at that point in time.

Establishing a home is just one aspect of a child's life. Another aspect is schooling, which is an important part of a child's routine, an ongoing developmental need (Dachyshyn, 2007; Machel, 2001), and a hope for a better future. The children's education in Afghanistan was interrupted because of war and they had to strive to begin dwelling again in Pakistan. The children

experienced challenges in attempting to attend school regularly. According to Machel (2001), hindrances to attending school may have been due to lack of identification documents that were lost during the war in Afghanistan or lack of finances to pay for tuition fees. Even when refugee children managed to enroll in the schools, they needed special programs or tutorials to learn the local language and catch up with years of schooling lost during conflict in their home country. In addition, funding from the international agencies was never enough for all refugee children to access suitable schools. Therefore, a building was rented and operated by the host Ismaili community in Pakistan to enable the Afghan refugee children to continue with their formal education.

### ***Transitional School Space***

*“It [The transitional school] had many options, like to tell you the truth it had many options, it had many facilities for people [like us and] it helped us a lot.” (Azim)*

Three of the seven Afghan children attended the transitory school set up by the Ismaili community in Pakistan and then were later transferred to Government schools. Two attended Government school only and the other two were too young to attend school in Pakistan. All of the Afghan refugee children lived in Pakistan for temporary periods; Azim and Izzat stayed in Pakistan the longest. Their photo conversations were full of positive experiences of growing up and living in Pakistan for almost a decade. The happy memories of going to school and bonding with friends in diverse spaces are still engrained in their memories; so much so, that although their embodied selves were residing in

Canada physically, their spiritual bodies are still connected to the bonds they created with friends while attending the transitional school in Pakistan.

Azim described the school he attended this way:

I had classes, this school that I was talking about that was paid by the Aga Khan, it had many options, like to tell you the truth it had many options, it had many facilities for the people, it helped us a lot. It was just like a big building besides where all the Ismaili community lived. . . . [Classes] were almost like the whole day . . . they taught English and Social [Studies] just like a normal school. . . . Like I had the Qur'an classes where they used to teach us Qur'an, where they used to teach us, like we had classes like BUI (Baitul-Ilm, religious classes) and stuff like that too yeah! . . . We had extra classes too. . . . In last year like grade 7, [because the special school was closed] I went to Government school [in Pakistan].

Izzat also shared her experience of going to the same transitional school as

Azim:

I was in a class like in this school, when we just came [from Afghanistan]. There was a special school of Aga Khan like in . . . [Pakistan] like all Afghans are there and studying there like they just started everything and we have different kind of subjects like Urdu, Persian, Religion, Sciences and everything. It was started for the Afghans to learn. Most of us when we came from Afghanistan, we had to start from grade 1 even when we had to be in grade 4. It was like helping us to understand [to catch up with studies].

Above, Izzat shared her views that attending the transitional school gave her and the other Afghan refugee students the opportunity to catch up with their studies that they had missed in Afghanistan so that they could better cope with the successive years of schooling. What are the other benefits of going to school? Going to school establishes a daily routine for children. In addition, it gives them a sense of belonging, creates a safe space for making friends, learning, and



building more confidence within themselves, their families, and their community (Hek, 2005; Machel, 2001; Pooley, Breen, Pike, Cohen, & Drew, 2008).

***Making friends and creating strong bonds.*** These children found solace in school and a place to develop friendships. Azim shared his experience of making friends when he started attending school in Pakistan:

Before when I was in Afghanistan, I did not have any friends, because I did not go to school [as] I was like only 4 years old, until I came to Pakistan. They [pointing at the friends in the picture] were my first friends that I met [in school], like from the day that I was in Pakistan' till the day I left Pakistan, they were my friends and we were so close together.

These were the same school friends with whom Azim developed strong bonds and had long term friendships while he lived for a decade in Pakistan. The children also learnt to trust and help each other with school work and they also socialized together. Azim further shared his memories about one particular friend who was the smartest and always got good grades.

He would help all of us in class succeed in our goals, learn English better...like yeah! This shows life like then, people were not so rich then but there was happiness between us, strong bond between us and we trusted each other like anything . . . all of us gathered up, like help each other . . . learn English together . . . and play cricket, soccer and used to fly kites, it was like good memories [face lighting up and an excitement in his voice].

These good memories of strong bonds with fellow classmates are priceless. A seed of true friendship is planted and the harvest brings about additional benefits of dwelling; for example, playing together, learning and supporting each other to learn new skills and to survive in a different environment. Azim tells us that flying kites in Pakistan brought back good

memories because that was something they were used to, back home in Afghanistan. One can fly kites as a pleasurable hobby or one can fly for competing with other children. Khaled Hosseini (2003) in his book *The Kite Runner* writes about the trustful relationship that existed between two friends. Flying the kite required trusting the friend to guide him to win as the moves have to be orchestrated using calculative psychomotor skills. The Afghan children came in contact with friends in school with similar interests, which further developed social bonds in a safe setting. Attending school also meant achieving a milestone in one's academic evolution.

***Receiving an achievement award.*** Receiving an award is a great achievement as well as a blissful moment in one's life normally but more important for these Afghan children who had lost opportunity of going to school in Afghanistan. Garmezy (1991) cites research that suggests that the presence of a source of external support, as exemplified by a concerned teacher, or the presence of an institutional structure, such as the church [Jamatkhana] or school that connects to a larger community serve as protective factors for children in stressful life situations.

Children cherished the memorable events of academic success when they received an achievement award. Gulshan shared her moment of joy while going to school in Pakistan, "I do not remember in which subject but in one subject I won a cup [laughs]." Azim also shared his award ceremony picture for completing an English course at the age of 13. Pointing at the picture, Azim proudly stated that,

“this is the picture . . . when I finished the English class and I got awarded with a certificate. . . . This is the ceremony with all the friends together.” School spaces facilitate children to socialize, to learn and to achieve and thus take their minds off their struggles and challenges of living in the aftermath of war.

### ***Jamatkhana Building Space***

In addition to the transitional school building, there is the Jamatkhana [prayer place] or “Khane/JK” that is generally used by the Ismaili community for religious activity in order to meet individual spiritual needs. The Jamatkhana is similar to the traditional mosque of other Muslims. It is particularly “for religious observances specific to the Ismaili tariqa [faith] of Islam” (Nanji, 1983, p.160). This Jamatkhana space is also “a vital gathering place for daily congregational prayers in the morning and evenings . . . the reinforcement of their [Ismaili] religious identity” (Nanji, p.160). In the Ismaili community, unlike that of traditional Muslims, both women and children participate actively in religious activities. “Activities in the jamatkhana are co-ordinated by individuals called Mukhi and Kamadia and their female counterparts in the congregation” (p. 161). This Jamatkhana space is also used to meet the social needs of the Ismaili community. Therefore, opportunities are available to all Ismailis including Afghan refugee children either before or after prayers for various socio-religious and cultural activities. The children created varied opportunities of living in this Jamatkhana space for themselves.

The children normally accompany their parents or grandparents to the Jamatkhana in order to offer prayers. The children have time to socialize with friends after the prayers until the parents are ready to go home. This is another example of an opportunity to cultivate friendships in a peaceful and safe setting as well as to fulfill religious and spiritual needs.

***Meeting place.*** For most children the Jamatkhana space became a gathering place to have some fun after the congregation. For others, it became a meeting place where the children gathered and walked home together. This allowed them to have some fun on their way home.

Azim related his experience of walking home with friends:

Yeah! [laughs] like you know after Khane [prayer place] . . . we go home and people do not have cars, we used to walk home. Like Ok! Let's do racing and we would run and sometimes like yeah! I am tired so lift me up and we lift each other up and bring them home and those kinds of stuff.

The meeting places for the Afghan children provide diverse opportunities such as solace for the body, mind and soul. It also gives a space to have fun and meet to plan activity with friends, make new friends as well as get additional support from community members. The Afghan children can practice their faith peacefully without any fear of being harmed as was the case in the war-torn country of Afghanistan. Most of all, meeting places serve as a place to express their true self with no false intended identity to be someone else.

***Treats from grandma.*** Farooq was four or five years of age when he was in Pakistan, which meant going to Jamatkhana accompanied by someone and that had its own unique advantage. This is what he related, "I remember, my grandma

would take me to the Jamatkhana everyday, which was big, really really big and lots of big stairs . . . then she would also buy ice cream [for me ] on the way back.” Farooq also got an opportunity to explore the spaces under the sky while going to Jamatkhana. He shared that he would run ahead, almost half way to the Jamatkhana space so that he could play in the sand until he spotted grandma. Then he would continue to have fun walking and running simultaneously, always keeping grandma within view so that he could join her to enter the Jamatkhana space for prayers. He knew that grandma would also look out for him. In addition to getting treats from grandma, Azim felt safe creating his own space to play every day innovatively on his way to and from home to the Jamatkhana space (Derr, 2006).

*Learning opportunity.* Izzat was a little older when she entered the transitional shore of Pakistan. She could not attend school in Afghanistan because war and safety were major issues. Even though the school was open, girls could not attend. Izzat had a different experience in the prayer space and this is what she related:

I got a [study] course in Jamatkhana, like I was going there on a Friday . . . Yeah! There was a man from Gilgit and he was so good in math . . . [he offered math tutorials] on Friday at 5 o’clock till 7:30” . . . so I [joined].

*Practicing faith peacefully.* When I asked Gulshan to describe what was good about Pakistan, she responded that, “in Pakistan there were Jamatkhana [prayer places] . . . I went every morning and evening [with] my mother and I liked that . . .” This experience of going to Jamatkhana was a new and valuable

experience for these Afghan refugee children who belong to the Shia Imami Ismaili sect. Especially for females including Gulshan, it was not easy to attend the prayer place every day in Afghanistan. Even when they wanted to leave the house they were to be escorted by a male family member. Considering the volatile political situation in Afghanistan, the women were reluctant to leave the house. Therefore, the transitional country of Pakistan provided these Afghan refugee families and their children the space to practice their faith peacefully and freely.

### *Creating Spaces to Play*

Besides using the buildings for living spaces, the children also looked beyond the walls and under the sky to create a space to have some fun. The act of searching for such spaces with friends also provided an opportunity to be together. Derr (2006) in his literature review asserts that children's environments shape their social development, learning and play. Children, whether living in an urban or rural environment, shape their own experiences within spaces of their choice. Derr elaborated the findings from his previous studies (2001 and 2002) on children with their families, about how children experience and learn by interacting with their environment. For example, he states that "children learn through adventure and risk taking" as well as "experience imagination, escape, safety, and creativity through active place-making and place attachment" (p. 109).

The Afghan children, especially boys like Azim, located innovative spaces with friends under the limitless sky for socialization. They gathered to play

cricket on the side streets as they felt the freedom to do so and it is a norm in Pakistan as there are no adequate grounds for poor children to play cricket.

*Play spaces within the building.* Farooq and Sonu who were three and four years old had to be locked in the house in Pakistan to keep them safe as both parents had to leave home to earn a living. This action by the parents may make us think awful things but the children used imaginative play of looking after each other by taking turns to dress as parents (Derr, 2006). These children were fully aware that their parents were working for them. The parents had requested the neighbor to peep in regularly through the window to see that they were safe. It is noteworthy how these children adapt to different kinds of environments and appreciate their parents who had to leave them at home while earning a living.

It was irrelevant to the children that none of the newly acquired friends had enough material resources. Being together and living in the same complex or neighborhood was treasured as it promoted making playing spaces for having fun together.

*Play spaces under the sky.* Azim elaborated that to find a space to play in Pakistan is so different than a space here in Canada because there:

Yeah! [Chuckle] we used to like go sometimes, we used to go and there was no space so OK! We would say OK! Where is the space? Where is the space? And then OK! There is the tree and let's just start playing, we can play there until someone kicks us out [we both laugh heartily] and that is where we start playing . . . there [in Pakistan] was not any playground, like we have in Canada, here you go off from the homes and there is like playgrounds yeah, so it was like this [in Pakistan], people used to throw their garbage and we used to clear the spot for ourselves to play games . . .

During my lived experience in Pakistan for almost 11 years I had the opportunity to observe how children created playing spaces for themselves on the residential streets. It was acceptable to everyone in the neighborhood that the children would block one side of the road to create spaces, for example, to play cricket. Even the traffic police did not arrest the children for blocking the road and people drove on the wrong side of the road to pass the children. It was an understood norm and it facilitated the children's normal growth and development. In some ways, making this informal space to play may be better than empty gyms and soccer fields, which seem to designate organized play.

The spaces that the children made were their own; the rules formed as they played. The creativeness of the space allowed the children to own that piece of land temporarily due to the confinement of the space. One has to wonder about this hermeneutically; being confronted with so many limitations in the past with safety in spaces, now they do not wish such constraints. They wish to be free to do what they might in their own way.

The Afghan refugee children tried to connect with each other under the limitless sky space. This was done in the form of sharing childhood experiences of dwelling back home in the war-torn country of Afghanistan. This is what Azim explained:

Yeah! We would tell each other our problems. . . . Like [one friend] his parents did not have anything back then [in Afghanistan] and stuff like that and we would sit together and tell stories of each other and how we were alone and how we grew up.



It did not matter to the children that they did not all own individual toys as they had figured out how to share personal things. Azim still had this vivid memory of sharing:

Like this guy [a friend] had a bike and none of us had it and we all used to share that same bike, riding his bike . . . Yeah! Like there was like three of us, one person sit in the front and one in the middle and one person at the back. Rest of them would walk that was fun [glow on his face]. . . . Sometime we would have a race and see who wins, three of us on the bike or the rest [who were] running...we had so much fun.

Photo conversations enabled me to observe the diverse spaces for opportunity that were embraced by the Afghan refugee children in the transitional country of Pakistan. These living spaces were utilized by the refugee children to the fullest in order to bring fun and joy to the core of their souls. Whether dwelling in spaces made of bricks such as the school or prayer house or open spaces under the vast sky, these Afghan children were able to share personal stories of joy and sorrow as well as play together from dawn to dusk. These environments of going to study, pray, play and have fun provided a safe haven for the refugee children who had to flee their own country.

The direction of the wind could become favorable or unfavorable depending on the environmental conditions. Fortunately, the shores of Pakistan as perceived by the Afghan refugee children were favorable. This is probably due to the flexible nature of children to adjust to a new environment faster than an adult. Each participant in this study had hopes for a better future on the shores of Canada as it would provide them with a sense of permanency in a peaceful country.

Some of the spaces of opportunity in Canada are similar to the ones on the transitional shore of Pakistan but with different ways of daily living. This may be due to the developmental age of the Afghan refugee children when entering Canada or the diverse expectations of socialization in and outside of the home. I will now share how the children experienced living on the shores of Canada.

### **Spaces of Opportunity in Canada**

The Afghan refugee children in this study, and their families, continued to have support to settle on the destination shores of Canada. Ismaili families who were already settled in Canada volunteered to assume the responsibility of settling the Afghan refugee families to ensure their smooth transition. This meant identifying availability of resources within the community as well as from the Canadian government. Similar to the assistance given in Pakistan, the Ismaili community in Canada assisted with housing and other basic needs of the Afghan children and their families. The difference was that in Pakistan the Afghan refugees were considered illegal immigrants. Therefore, the Afghan refugees were unable to access government resources. On entering the shores of Canada, the Afghan refugees did not face the problem of accessing resources as they were granted refugee status by the government. This legal status made a major impact on the children's settling process described below.

#### ***A Home to Dwell***

Their organized entry into Canada allowed the Afghan refugee children to settle quickly in comfortable dwellings. The children identified several

individuals who played a vital role in ensuring their smooth transition. The children were therefore able to concentrate on adjusting to the Canadian school system. This was very apparent during the photo conversations.

Below are the voices of some children on their experiences of entering the shores of Canada. This is what Meera related:

They [Ismaili Community] had a guest house for refugees . . . so we were living there for a couple of weeks until they got us an apartment . . . and then we moved . . . and we have been living here ever since.

Tayreez shared a picture of the person who helped her family: “She is the one [pointing at the picture] that set us up and the other people in Jamatkhana helped us with our house and everything and they really made us comfortable.”

Tayreez further explained her experience of entering the shores of Canada:

When I came here, I remember we got all the furniture and we got our TV and I remember during Christmas they [members from the Ismaili Community] would come and give us presents and they would always visit us.

The transition from Pakistan into the dwelling spaces in Canada with the continued support from the already settled Ismaili community has been a memorable experience for the Afghan refugee children in this study. In addition, attending school officially has been both a healing and a challenging experience for these children.

### ***School Spaces in Canada***

The wind was favorable for the younger children to integrate into the Canadian school system. This may have been because they were able to attend

day care in Canada while they were young. Meera explained that, “I went to this day care for the kids while my mom was having her . . . English as Second Language (ESL) classes.”

The older children who were approximately age nine and above had to face more unfavorable winds as they entered the shores of Canada. They had a challenging experience adjusting to the school curriculum as it was different from that of Pakistan. But this experience also provided an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills and progress academically.

*Adjustment: English language and school system.* All of the Afghan refugee children in this study were grateful for the assistance they received in Canada to learn ESL formally. English was actually their third language as they spoke Farsi at home with family members and learnt Urdu to adapt in Pakistan. Some of them learnt English in Pakistan but struggled with spoken English due to the different accents.

When I was learning Farsi while working in Afghanistan, I realized that the action verb is normally at the end of the sentence. Therefore, these Afghan refugee children found it a real challenge when constructing appropriate sentences in the English language. Comprehending the English language is very important to be able to understand what is going on in the class. Furthermore, language is full of cultural expressions that may not necessarily be familiar to a newcomer.

Izzat was 15 years old when she arrived in Canada. She had to be assessed before being placed in a certain grade. Below is the explanation of her experiences of the process that was used:

First of all I went for two or three months to junior high [Grade 9] and then they put me in regular classes but not really regular. I was not going to Social class or Science class . . . uhm I just did art like drawing and stuff and then sometimes English class. For some I was going to regular class and most of them I was going with another teacher and they were reading stories for us and we tell them what is going on in the story and stuff. . . . Because like I knew English a little bit but I could not speak too much English . . . I was hearing what they were saying but I was picking some words. Because their [Canadian] pronunciation is different [not like in Pakistan] right! Like they are talking so fast that I don't know what they are talking about. Like some words I was thinking what they are saying and yet they are talking about something. Most of them I was not hearing what they were saying. . . . And then when I went to high school they just put me in ESL class level 1 for one semester and then . . . in Level 4. . . . Then I went to my regular class. . . grade 10 and they did not put me in Science 10 regular class, I was trying to like get Math 10 because my Math was not that bad, I did some math studies in Pakistan too.

Azim had similar experience. This is what he conveyed:

Last year I was in Grade 9, they [gave] me the proficiency achievement test to check me. . . . I did better and I had a 75 and they like [said] "you can go to Grade 10 English" so that is how I went to Grade 10 English. But still I am not a Canadian and I am not that good, I should be the one that should be helped first in the whole class because I just moved in that class. The teacher did not know that yeah because I did not tell her [my history] when I moved here. Then one day after class, I told her and right now she helps me a lot and that helps a lot right now, my English is improving way better.

These children faced a numerous challenges in learning the English language. Despite this, they resolved to take every opportunity available to them to do well academically.

***Receiving an achievement letter.*** Gulshan verbalized enthusiastically that her hard work was appreciated by the teachers and she received an encouraging letter from the Principal. She was very humble and shy in letting me know about her achievements in school. During the photo conversation, Gulshan was grateful that her teachers had helped her in English when she first came to Canada. She was happy that she had completed Grade 11 and would be going to Grade 12 in the next academic year. I further questioned Gulshan if she was worried about going to Grade 12. In response she laughed and so I commented that she must be a good student and that is when she related the good news about her getting an appreciation letter for performing well during the academic year. This is how Gulshan stated:

Well, I got a note, an invitation to see the principal and I was really worried and when I went, there were 20 [other] students and he [informed me as to] what a good student I had been. When I opened the envelope, he said that, “you really improved your marks in Biology and you saved your life and just have faith.” So I was happy to hear that. It was written, *‘you did good job.’*”

Any kind of recognition of good performance in the school becomes a motivating factor to continue to work harder and do well or excel. Recognition is important to the children in this new country because it boosts their self esteem. The encouragement verbally and in writing from the Principal of the school gave Gulshan a lot of joy and confidence that she is performing well. She informed me that she used to seek help from the teachers during lunch time, and from community members, and friends in the evenings in order to succeed. The achievement letter further convinced Gulshan that she has to continue to work

hard to succeed in the next academic year. She was also fully aware that she will continue to need extra assistance to be successful in her studies.

### ***Jamatkhana Space in Canada***

The Afghan children continue to attend Jamatkhana (in Canada) for prayers in order to practice their faith. In Canada it is difficult to get to the prayer place every day because of varied reasons. The children have to balance their time between going to school, completing their homework, preparing for exams, family obligations and working in the evenings to earn a living. Moreover, in Pakistan the Afghan children did not have to work and study at the same time and they lived within walking distance of the Jamatkhana. Therefore, it was easier to get to Jamatkhana daily with their family members. In Canada the Ismaili community has tried to arrange transportation for those who have difficulty getting to the prayer place. One of the participant's parents informed me that it was not always convenient to take advantage of transportation because of her evening job. Most of the Afghan children in this study managed to get to the prayer place with their parents in their family car or by the transportation provided by the Ismaili community.

As mentioned previously, all of the Afghan children in this study belong to the Shia Imami Ismaili sect and therefore believe in His Highness the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader. The continuous support and guidance from him through the Ismaili Council and the community's institutions play a significant role in the lives of the children.

*Spiritual leader.* Izzat stated that within the Jamatkhana space she hears the readings of encouragement from her spiritual leader about the importance of education. This further motivates her to work harder all the time. This is what she had to say:

Then every time I am going to JK [prayer place], and hearing [the read out of] our Spiritual Leader . . . like every time he is saying different kind of words and it affects students. Like mostly to the students that we have to study. Like one time he says that ‘you have to try your best and you have to like continue your education’ . . . it makes you feel like working even harder.

Similar to the experiences of going to Jamatkhana in Pakistan, the Afghan refugee children also received tutorial assistance from the Ismaili community in Canada. There are tutorials offered twice a week within the Jamatkhana space to understand the new material or catch up with their studies.

*Tutorials.* The challenge for these Afghan refugee children was to adapt to a new way of learning and to adjust to the Canadian accent in order to comprehend the content taught in class. The Ismaili community members made arrangements to assist the children to catch up with their school work so that they could have a smooth transition to the Canadian school system. Izzat voiced that:

. . . when we first came he [community member] was our teacher and then his brother too, and then he was always like helping. He was also giving his phone number and also email and said that ‘if you want help or have any problem and to ask on the phone and if I had time I would come to JK if I could and help you guys in your studies’ and so that was good. . . . I was getting help from lots of teachers, my teacher of school course, another one in JK, he was always like so kind of good teacher and then whenever I was getting help, he was like ‘write yourself every single word and then without calculator write everything down’ and he would take away my calculator and he would say ‘count it yourself’ and if I was



counting in Persian, he was like ‘you have to do it in English’ and the time was finishing and he would say, ‘I do not care how much time it takes one hour or something but you have to do it here yourself.’ So I was doing all the homework over there [in the Jamatkhan space]. . . . There is like classes that everybody is coming and every single person had a teacher.

I asked Izzat, “How are you doing in your studies at present?” She responded that,

My studies well, first of all it was so hard because I was not that good but now it’s good . . . [pause]. . . . When I came here like first of all when I just started Applied Math and that was so easy for me and then when I got like Science, it was little bit hard for us but we had our classes [extra help] in Jamatkhana [prayer place] . . . Yeah! They are helping us and those kinds of things two times a week... it is on Monday and Thursday. . . . Yeah! And then they are trying to like open another class on Wednesday too, because of some of our subjects in diploma and we have to get high marks.

Izzat appreciated that the Afghan refugee children like her are getting a lot of support from the community members to adjust to the Canadian school system. This kind of tutorial assistance is still ongoing and because of this continued help Izzat has developed the confidence to take on Science subjects as she wants to enter medical school. Izzat feels that she is very fortunate to have so many volunteer teachers in the Jamatkhana space to assist her in understanding the difficult concepts of any subject. She also shared that the non-Ismaili Afghan refugees in her school did not attempt to take Science subjects as they found it very tough. She thought that they were marginalized because they do not have the tutorial support she does.

Gulshan and Azim also go to the Jamatkhana space almost every day but then twice a week after prayers Gulshan gets “*help from the community members*

[especially in biology]” and Azim gets help in sociology. Tayreez, Meera, Sonu, and Farooq do not access this assistance as they are doing fine in school but are aware that these tutorials are available in the Jamatkhana space.

### *Support Spaces*

Besides getting tutorial assistance in the Jamatkhana space the Afghan refugee children were able to navigate significant support spaces around other individuals. Teachers and the counselors in the school, in addition to parents and members of the Ismaili community in Canada, play a significant role in facilitating these children to progress academically.

***Teachers and counselors.*** The teachers and counselors in the school played a vital role in encouraging the Afghan refugee children to master the English language. Izzat shared:

I was in ESL Level 1 for one semester and then she [teacher] put me in Level 4. She said “your English is good . . . find a friend who is not Afghani and then you have to talk with them [in English] . . . you find new words and then you have to learn that” . . . so OK! But the bad thing is that there were lots and lots of Afghani and then some of them came from Iran and they were not like Ismaili but they were all Afghani. . . . We were talking in Farsi, but our teacher said that “Ok! Who ever talks in Farsi then I will charge them one dollar” [laughs]. . . . Then they were charging us money [if we were found speaking in Farsi]

Izzat was very touched that the counselor had faith in her and had convinced the school teacher not to worry about her performance in English. The counselor told the teacher that she had assessed Izzat and that she understands English very well but has to only get used to the accent. Going to school in Pakistan and taking extra English classes had improved Izzat’s English

proficiency. Gulshan, Azim, Sonu, and Farooq also mentioned how their teachers created encouraging spaces for them to learn English.

***Parents.*** All the children in this study stressed that their parents played an important role in encouraging them to study diligently to prepare for a better future. Izzat, during her photo conversation, talked about repeating the Math course twice to ensure a good mark. She voiced with determination that, “I will do it” to succeed. I asked her, “What is it that makes you do it? Who makes you do it?” Izzat explained:

Ok! First of all my daddy is pressing me ‘you have to go to University, you have to try to go to University, if you don’t I will be so mad on you.’ I am like I am trying hard. . . . I will try harder.

Izzat also felt that as she is the oldest in the family and she is trying to be a role model for her siblings. It is important for Izzat to set a good example and “get good marks to be able to get admission into the University for further studies.” She felt strongly that the ethics of her faith and guidance from the spiritual leader also played an important part in motivating her to study hard.

Not all of the experiences of the Afghan children pertaining to education in Canada were positive. They had challenges both with the education system and in their attempt to integrate into the Canadian society. These are outlined in more detail in the chapter seven.

### **Summary**

The Afghan refugee children in my research study sought a new beginning in the spaces provided for them both in the transitional shore of Pakistan and in

their final port in Canada. The children also created their own innovative spaces to dwell in the *fourfold*. Playing with friends in self-created spaces holds good memories for children and carries a nostalgic effect of wanting to be there and yet having to be here in their new world. We all have some memories of good old times and we wish to cherish them.

“Remembering the nostalgia of childhood allows us to live in the moment and contemplate how things in the present should be and gives us a brainwave to change things for the better” (Smith, 1991, p. 162). I recently went back to my home town and all the memories of my mother and me traveling back and forth on the free ferry eating cassava chips appeared very vividly to me. The space and the memories of being with my mother were there but everything else had changed.

These Afghan refugee children are nostalgic for the space of home, but also they soak up their families’ nostalgia. They still have to go on living in the Canadian setting while carrying this past with them; I think it makes them mature sooner. In addition, within the spaces, the children sought individuals who facilitated their progress and assisted them to cope with daily living. It appears that facing calamity in their home country equipped them with an inner strength to adjust to their new world. The winds are full of play for these children, full of opportunities, and hope, but also winds of safety.

Although the Afghan refugee children shared the opportune challenges of settling in the new world, each of them voiced Canada as a peaceful country with

a lot of opportunities for their future livelihood. Support from the Canadian society along with the Ismaili community played a key role in ensuring that these children and their families are settled properly in Canada. They said that Canada embraced them fully as refugees and facilitated their learning. Allowed to retain their Afghan culture, embedded inside Ismaili culture, and supported by Canadian culture was consistently a part of the children's conversation. In the next chapter I reflect on the experiences of Afghan children and how they build and sustain resilience.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: BUILDING AND SUSTAINING RESILIENCE

Humans are born with an incredible ability to adapt to changes in their environment. While our brains have probably not changed in the past thousand years, the repertoire of skills necessary to survive certainly has. The flexibility to adapt comes at a price however; we are born completely dependent on others. (White, 2005, p. 4)

White (2005) in the quote above shows that we are dependent on each other in this world and therefore we need the supports provided by other human beings. Based on the preceding chapters four, five and six, a strong finding is that the Afghan children in this study are doing very well. As they described their daily life, they touched on some difficult moments and outlined some challenges. But overall they were happy to describe their experiences and happy to be living in Canada. What becomes quickly evident in this group is the consistent support that they received from the Ismaili Community from the time they entered Pakistan up to now in Canada. We hear it in the voices in the *photo conversations* of these Afghan children remembering that children tell us what they want to in this methodology. The extra supports they receive surround their daily life within the family, school, and Jamatkhana. It could be said that these children are resilient due to the exquisite consistent support (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Garmezy, 1991). Below I describe the nature of this support.

In this chapter first I present the daily life of these Afghan refugee children in the transitional country of Pakistan and in the host country of Canada. In addition, I will discuss how the children through *photo conversation* express the importance of consistent *diverse* supports that facilitated them to adapt and

continue to build and sustain resilience. As well I show elements of the nature of the support. What speaks most directly to their experiences is learning how to live with their families in new and different spaces and environments. I also endeavor to describe the challenges and tensions faced by the Afghan refugee children and the strategies developed in adapting to the adversities or challenges experienced in these new environments. The challenges include keeping up with schoolwork, making new friends, and adjusting to the geography of living far from friends and relatives. Descriptions of supports and challenges make up the bulk of this chapter.

Second, because in this study, these children described themselves as doing very well, I will discuss the findings of selected studies in light of this. My intent here is to compare and contrast these children with other refugee children from war-torn areas and with immigrant children as well. I end the chapter with a note on learning to dwell from Heidegger's (1971) essay.

### **Resilience Built and Sustained through Consistent Supports**

As discussed in chapter two, resilience is determined by inference from the context of risk or adversity. Two conditions required to identify resilience or strength in a person's life are: (a) exposure to significant adversity that requires strength to overcome it; and (b) the being is able to dwell or live well despite having experienced harsh conditions (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten & Powell, 2003). These two conditions are present in the findings in this study.

### **Exposure to and Consequences of Dwelling or Living in Adversity**

The consequences of the adversities of war that pertained to the Afghan children in this study were homelessness, loss of opportunity for education, as well as loss of human and material resources. These findings were similar to the findings by researchers on Afghans (Berry et al., 2003; Halimi, 2002) and other refugee children (Machel, 2001; Schleicher, 2003; Sommers, 2002). This is how the Afghan children reflected on the adversities of war in Afghanistan. Farooq explained that, “because there was a lot of war there [in Afghanistan] my whole family had to leave the country.” Izzat mentioned that “girls could not go to school during the Taliban regime.” Azim elaborated, “they had to leave everything behind in Afghanistan as they could not bring anything with them.” Gulshan related her story of why her family was forced to leave Afghanistan when she was only 6 or 7 years old:

Taliban came . . . They were just taking people’s houses . . . They were just killing the people and [or] taking them away. I remember it. When they came they tried to take my brother and my dad. My mother talked to them, we hide my dad and brother and told them, and she [my mother] said that “I do not have anybody here, just my daughters” and they went away. . . . and [then] we moved to Pakistan.

As mentioned by the Afghan children above, it is the *whole being* that is affected by war including “the body, mind, spirit, and relationship with others” (Walsh, 2007, p. 207). The children were uprooted from their homes, and their lives disrupted as they had to flee their homeland to a foreign place to save their lives. There was no guarantee that what awaited them was a safe haven. Any human being in these circumstances would be devastated. Chapter 2 discusses the



adversities that happen to children of war and subsequently how they become resilient. The empirical data of this study also relates to consequences of war. These children were also able to face their adversities positively due to consistent supports.

There has been a tendency of looking at the pathology or negative experiences of adversity; for example, PTSD which is categorized as a mental disorder (American Psychiatric Association [DSM III & IV], 2000). But it is vital to look at the strengths or use a positive lens to give the children an opportunity to continue growing normally and shield the negatives or weaknesses (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Walsh, 2007). Therefore, understanding dwelling in adversity could be gleaned from the perspective of an individual, family, or community facing adversity or hardships (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McCubbin et al., 1997; Werner, 1989, 1993) and the supports available to them. Other researchers (Apfel & Simon, 1966; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Masten & Powel, 2003; McCubbin et al., 1997; Walsh, 2002) have developed frameworks to determine resilience and used them for intervention to enhance the processes of adaptation in children, families and communities.

### **A Journey of Supports: Supports in Pakistan**

As described in the previous chapter, FOCUS Pakistan, the humanitarian institution of AKDN in collaboration with the funding from UNHCR and assistance from the Ismaili community of Pakistan provided support to the

Afghan families (M. Kanji, personal communication). Although there were transit centers or refugee camps set up in Pakistan, the children in this study did not have to stay in refugee camps. On arrival in Pakistan, two participants with their families joined their relatives in the city of Karachi. Since the other five children and their families settled in the city of Rawalpindi where there were no transit centers, they were provided with food, clothing, and rental units by the Ismaili community. There was also the opportunity of employment for the adults in the family, which enabled them to face adversity. Azim, one of the research participants, eloquently shared the impact of support during *photo conversation* that “it was very good, people built up their life very quickly.” In addition, a transitional school building space was rented and operated by the Ismaili community of Pakistan for the children in order to continue with their formal education. Izzat, another research participant, voiced about this school space as a place where they “had to start from grade 1 [to catch up with studies].”

### **The Journey Continues: Supports in Canada**

The greatest support for the Afghan children and their families was that they were legal refugee immigrants and could dwell in Canada without the fear of being expelled from the country. In Pakistan there was always this fear. In addition, the children could access the government facilities for example, attending school. The facilities and funding provided by the Government of Canada for the resettlement of refugees was not sufficient for these children to flourish. These children were fortunate to have the added consistent support of the

Ismaili community in Canada in order to face the adversities of day-to-day living. The Afghan children in this study always had their parents with them to comfort them. According to Garbarino and Kostelny (1996), in addition to children having individual strength, “successful adaptation and “resilience” lies in the balance of social supports from and for parents and other adults” (p. 41) such as members of extended family and the Ismaili community.

### **Drawing from Divine Support**

In this study, Tayreez expressed speaking with a close family member and having faith in her spiritual leader as her way of dealing with feelings of sadness or loneliness whenever she missed her companion pet dog Remy who left this physical world:

I go to my sister and we talk about it. . . . Also whenever I am sad I remember him [the spiritual leader] making those actions with his hand [hugging]. I know when I am sad He is sad too and that nothing will happen to me and all my troubles will be taken care [of] by Him. He [the spiritual leader] is very special to everyone.

Meera explained that she recited the name of Allah as her way of trying to overcome fear:

My uncle when he tells us a story he is so good at telling stories and his daughter and me were so scared and we were hugging each other [we both laughed] and we would say “Ya Ali Ya Ali” (one of the names of Allah)

Practicing faith is also a way of expressing spirituality that promotes and sustains resilience within a being in the face of adversity (Joseph, 1994; Hestyanti, 2006; Walsh, 2003). The children in this study also drew strength from their faith and practices such as attending Jamatkhana to pray with their family

members. In addition, the support system of family members, friends, the Ismaili community, the unwavering faith in the divine power, and finding meaning in adversity as identified above contributed to building and sustaining the strong foundation of the being.

Omeri, Lennings, and Raymond (2004) explicated that if adversity is considered a meaningful experience then it occurs through a process of transformative response and gives an individual a sense of control over outcomes. The response to meaningful adversity enables the being to reach out from the inner self to others. The source of meaning could be through strong support of the building materials such as humans, prayers, music and art (MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2007) or through the divine support of the spiritual leader or the Almighty Allah. In a study done by McMichael (2002) one participant expressed her source of meaning to endure emotional stress through prayers:

“If I ever need anything, the first thing I do is pray. If I need a good friend, I turn to Allah and I say ‘Allah, I need you as a good friend.’ Allah is not going to gossip about you; Allah is not going to hate you if you return over and over, asking and asking. If anything, if you ask something, Allah would love you for it. If I am sick, if I need a special thing, if I need a simple thing, I just pray. Allah is the only one that I seek help from, the only one I can rely on.”

Besides having a religious or divine support system, an individual’s personality traits also play a role in cultivating resilience. According to Kobasa (1979), Omeri et al. (2004), and Rutter (1987), a person with resilience has a personality trait of hardiness. Furthermore, they contend that hardiness entails three characteristics: belief in capacity to influence events in one’s experience

(control); ability to be profoundly involved in activities of their lives (commitment); and, inclination to view change as an opportunity for growth (challenge). For example, the Afghan refugee children in this study were in full control of their play environment and committed to each other and they could structure their environment in any way they wished as described in previous chapters. It is beautiful to note once again, that the children organized play spaces wherever they could; garbage dumps, busy streets, jamatkana, in small rooms. Play itself was learning how to live or adapt to new conditions, a beautiful strengthening process. In addition, attending school, giving voluntary service, practicing their faith, and caring for siblings enabled them to strive forward in life to take on all challenges as opportunities for growth.

The variety of experiences in the faith community provided these children with many instances that both supported their faith and gave them a chance to try different things. In turn, the children spoke of building their confidence to accomplish something through being involved in community activities.

### **Drawing from Family and Community Support**

The Afghan refugee children as described in chapter four, presented photographs of family members. They confidently conveyed that their strength came from living with their family. Family togetherness not only instilled courage but also gave support and protection at all times. The availability of enduring family support made a significant impact on the life-worlds of the Afghan children. Researchers (Garnezy, 1991; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth,

1998) have also identified the presence of caring adults either during or after major stresses as the most important protective factor for children.

In this study it was clearly demonstrated that the extended family and the Ismaili community also played major roles in supporting the children to deal with their daily hassles in life. To give an example, during the data collection phase I learnt that there was a crisis in Tayreez's family. Therefore, her uncle, aunt and specific Ismaili community members took over the role of caring for all the children in the family until the situation stabilized. These children continued to go to school and performed all their routine activities with this support. According to Joseph (1994) "the predictability that comes from a routine helps stabilize the chaos that so often follows a loss or crisis" (p. 279). It offers security as well as builds and sustains resilience. A resilient approach was also used by the family when Tayreez's pet dog Rexy had an incurable disease. The whole family was involved in the decision of putting Rexy to sleep and they all grieved together and supported each other (Joseph, 1994).

Meera is confident of *life-time support* and strength derived from her parents and family, referring to the *interdependent* relationship between the Afghan children, their parents and the extended family. There is an emphasis on the collective family nurturance. In addition, there is cultural expectation from parents to support their children for their entire life time and in return the children are obliged to look after their parents when they grow old (Dupree, 2000). Meera beautifully summarizes:

We get a lot of support from parents and it is not like we leave our parents and live on our own when we are 18. We support them and we also get support from the parents and family [members] for our whole life.

Sonu shared a picture of her uncle at her birthday party. She verbalized the presence of extended family as part of the family unit that was always there for her and acted as a buffer when things were rough with parents. Sonu is also trying to tell us that she views her family in the context of her parents as well as her uncle who when required would step in and take over the responsibility of nurturing:

Yeah, Boy! [sighs] I miss him he is my favorite uncle out of all others. He's my favorite uncle because my dad would try to teach me something and I would not get it, he would get mad, and stuff but my uncle would take me away. He spent a lot of money on me and my brother . . . He [uncle] was a security guard at some place and he didn't have much time as he worked night shifts but he [still] made time for my birthday.

According to Roland (1966) cited in Tumalla-Narra (2007) the interdependence of self and others was also found among Chinese, Indians and Turks. Werner and Smith (1982) affirmed that resilient children have the capacity to attract support from diverse individuals. According to Walsh (2007) a multisystemic resilience-oriented practice approach recognizes the consequences of major trauma and attends to the “ripple effects through relational networks, and aims to strengthen family and community resources for optimal recovery” (p. 207). Therefore, dwelling and experiencing the adversities contributes for an opportunity to form strong family bonds.

Zukav (2000) in his book titled *Soul Stories* described his philosophical view that children see every being as a soul in an earth suit. Therefore, the children “see everyone, including themselves, as souls. They see their aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, and grandparents as souls. They see their parents that way, too” (p. 198). In my study, all the children tried to articulate this concept by conveying their closeness with their family members. In addition, these Afghan children endeavored to live within the spirit of the Muslim religion and follow the traditional teachings of Islam pertaining to *brotherhood*. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in his teachings always stressed that all Muslims (Ummah) regardless of their geographical location are brothers and sisters in religion. The sayings of Prophet Muhammad highlight the spirit of *brotherhood* and convey that, “all Muslims are as one body. If a man complaineth of pain in the head, his whole body feeleth the pain, and if his eye pains his whole body feeleth the pain” (Azizullah, 1972, p. 95-96). Therefore, “all Muslims are like the component parts of a foundation, each strengthening the other; in such a way must they support each other” (Azizullah, p. 96).

Furthermore, to go beyond the understanding of *brotherhood* among Muslims, “the creation is as God’s family; for its sustenance is from Him; therefore the most beloved unto God is the person who doeth good to God’s family” (p. 96). These teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) illustrate the philosophical belief of Muslims that *all humans belong* to one unitary being (*soul*). According to the Islamic belief the *ummah* can also be



considered as a larger family unit (Femia, & Moghadam, 2008) and could go beyond including all humans in the universe. Therefore, an obligation on all Muslims is to be caring and look after each other (Muslims and non-Muslims). For the children each individual in the family unit (including the community) strengthened the foundation of their dwelling in order to face a particular hardship that came their way. In their photo conversation the children spoke so easily and forthrightly of feeling surrounded with acceptance and love and being part of a larger human family unit. The photos through which the children conversed with me were group photos of family and community members at certain celebrations and events.

Burgo (2006) affirms that the sense of belonging to the family, and being loved increases the self-esteem of children. In addition, children develop an '*I can do it!*' attitude that helps them learn, grow, and cope with life's inevitable problems (Burgo, ¶ 3) in order to become resilient. This positive way of thinking also facilitates children to develop problem-solving skills, to do well in school, and to avoid getting into trouble. The above concept is mirrored by all the children as they are working hard to achieve good grades. Izzat, Gulshan, Tayreez, and Meera want to pursue the medical profession in the future. Sonu wants to be a journalist and Farooq wants to be a policeman. Azim is aspired to register in the field of political science with the hope of fulfilling his dream of returning to Afghanistan and contributing positively to his country of origin. These children show a positive perception of themselves and a hopeful outlook on

life in future, have positive relationships with the family unit, and seek support from the members of the community to achieve their goals (Masten & Powell, 2003). According to Luthar, Sawyer, and Brown (2006), their literature review of over 50 years on childhood resilience show that good positive parent-child relationships can generate “feelings of confidence, security, and self-efficacy” (p. 111) in children.

### **Gathering Support by Maintaining the Afghan Culture**

Treasuring one’s own identity and integrating with the other cultures facilitates viewing life in a diverse way (Doane & Varcoe, 2005; Ellis, 1999; Falicov, 2007) and transforming oneself by making meaning of the experiences. For example, when Meera learnt that her non-Afghan friend was longing to move out from home when she turned 18, it forced Meera to reflect on the values embedded in the Afghan-culture. Meera preferred the Afghan culture of lifetime support from parents and the expectation of interdependency of family members that facilitates coping with daily struggles of life rather than the western culture of individualization.

As elaborated in chapter five, the children treasured their Afghan identity by communicating in Farsi with their family members. For example, the children learnt English as a second language to survive and progress in school and to converse with non-Afghan friends in the community. All the children in this study also learnt Urdu to survive in the transitional country of Pakistan. Learning multiple languages also served as a strong protective factor for the children and

their families. The children were able to translate and help themselves and their parents to ease their experiences of everyday living. Furthermore, proficiency in more than one language is generally considered an asset, especially in Canada. Understanding different languages also creates an opportunity of connecting, understanding, and valuing diverse cultures within Canada. In addition, it increases the children's self-esteem and facilitates building social networks as well as strengthening the foundation of their dwelling. Meera explicates an example of living between two cultures:

We go camping every summer, its like me, my uncle my other uncle, my other uncle, like our whole relatives from here and Calgary. . . . We normally go early in the morning at 5 o'clock. We normally go to Jasper and Banff. We go there lots . . . we take tents it's just more fun in the tents. . . . Once when we went, this was Banff I think, we were really partying around our campsite and it was 9 o'clock or so. We made a really big campfire and we were just sitting around and telling stories, laughing, singing and some of us were dancing around the camp fire. There was this father and daughter . . . they were watching us . . . someone noticed them . . . and we asked them if they would like to come and join us and they did. . . . They are just dancing around the fire and we had a lot of fun. . . . Like there are some really good moments we had. Mostly, a lot of times when we go camping and when we start dancing around the camp fire there are lots of people like Canadians who come and join with us as well at the camp site and there is a lot of fun.

The Afghan parents in this study integrated their own culture of family gatherings with the western concept of camping outside their home. The camping trip that Meera refers to motivated her family members and friends to join with others from the neighboring country of USA, and some other cities in Canada as well. Non-Afghans within the campsite were attracted to the sound of music and the Afghan dancing and festivities. Meera was excited to have these individuals

join them at the campfire and actually she said she was thrilled to see them dancing with them. Any non-Afghan Canadian joining the Afghan camping party raises curiosity within individuals in the group. According to Dr. Al Siebert (2005) all children are born with a curious mind grow up to ask the *why* questions. It is a process of understanding about themselves and their environments as well as developing skills in dealing with diverse situations. Therefore, “curiosity is essential to resiliency” (p.93) because it acquires a quick read of understanding what is going on in one’s surroundings. He further explained that those who can relate faster to the unexpected events of life worlds are the ones with the best cognition. In contrast those who cannot perceive things correctly in their environment may have difficulty surviving (Siebert, 2005). These kinds of outings not only facilitated family togetherness but also connected the children and their families to larger networks in the Canadian world, which serve as building blocks to resilience (McCubbin et al., 1997; Werner, 2005).

According to Berry (2008), this process of integration promotes psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Integration is one of the four strategies of acculturation process explained by Berry (2008). He defined *integration* as maintaining the integrity of one’s original culture as well as participating in the larger society. The other three strategies are *assimilation*: is giving up one’s own cultural values and embracing the new or dominant culture; *separation*: is maintaining only one’s own culture and not interacting others; and *marginalization*: where there is little interest in maintaining one’s and adapting to

another culture (Berry, 2008). To date these children have said they enjoy their language and their Afghan culture very much. But they also talk about experiences of integrating into Canadian culture such as school experiences, speaking English with Canadian students and teachers in school, and assisting their parents in various situations where English translation is required. However it is apparent in the data that Afghan parents remain very family and culture oriented and in this way keeps their children closely monitored.

The family has been known historically to be a medium of passing on cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from one generation to another. Maintaining the original culture plays a role in giving stability to children and an identity that assists in building and sustaining resilience (Masten & Powell, 2003). However, adjusting and adapting to live in a new country within its social and cultural context is also important. Furthermore, it is important to note that Canada recognizes the distinct usage of these four processes depending on the emphasis of the value placed on the maintenance of culture by a given group.

Another component of most cultures is volunteerism. As Ismailis, the children in this study made reference to volunteering and the positive feeling they derived from the service. Serving others without recognition is an old Islamic tradition that has been practiced by Muslims for over 1,400 years (His Highness the Aga Khan, 2008). It is a service embraced by Ismailis who instill this value in their children by role modeling. It enhances confidence, leadership qualities, and opens avenues to build human resources within and beyond the community. Some

of the participants in this study have already served as team leaders which entailed responsibility of teaching on supervising the children. Some examples of volunteering for these children include cleaning the Jamatkhana after the prayers are over and setting up for the following day, escorting the elderly inside the prayer hall and serving water if someone is thirsty. According to Izzat, volunteerism facilitated networking through “meeting new people [during volunteering], and then getting [forming] new relationship . . . like knowing new people in JK.” For the Afghan refugee children these relationships could become a whole network of support system for building and sustaining resilience in the future. Below are the feelings of volunteering experienced by Azim:

Feeling happy inside doing it [volunteering] but I don't know how, but it just makes me happy. . . . It's actually helping the Jamat [everyone in the community], For example, sometimes a senior comes and I like helping them . . . like take off his jacket and his shoes off and take him inside JK.

### **Garnering Support from Varying Spaces**

Human beings have the innate ability to create opportune spaces to dwell and thrive in diverse spaces during their entire life (Siebert, 2005). Children with their curious minds actively explore their environment and learn from discovering new things and making mistakes or by getting in trouble. The spaces of opportunity discovered by the Afghan refugee children were in the home, the school, the Jamatkhana space, and around the individuals such as extended family members, friends and members of the Ismaili community. Some of these spaces also facilitated opportunity for building and sustaining a support system for adapting to the new environments.

### *Home*

Tayreez articulates the feeling of gaining control over her life by recalling her experience of stability and the significance of permanency in her life - “I remember our first house, it was very special I guess because it was my first Canadian home and I really like cherished it.” This assistance of renting a home by the Ismaili community of Pakistan and Canada contributed to coping with the new environment. The *tarbia* (upbringing) of the children and planning for their future becomes easier when the family is able to live in one place under one roof. A dwelling place gives stability and safety, and provides an address from which to apply for a job, benefits, training, and a school in the neighborhood (Carter & Polevychok, 2004; Perry, 2005).

### *School*

Researchers have found that when refugee children attend school it gives them stability, increases their confidence, self-esteem, problem solving abilities, and career opportunities (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Hek, 2005; Machel, 2001). The Afghan children identified the advantages of going to school such as making friends, creating strong bonds of friendship, learning to fulfill aspirations of becoming something, and being useful in contributing towards the society with a general direction for the hope of a better future. They also mentioned about the human and material resources accessible as supports provided by the school system in Canada, which provided positive experiences of living. For example, the principals and teachers took extra efforts to motivate them to be great

achievers. In addition, the well-equipped library with books and computers facilitated learning.

Hek (2005) interviewed 15 refugee students in two schools in the United Kingdom (UK) between the ages of 13 to 17 years. Similar to the finding in this study, the students identified that the positive attitude of teachers, friends and peer support played a very important role in adjusting to the new country. Other researchers (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten & Powell, 2003; McCubbin et al., 1997) have also identified the school environment as contributing to resilience in children who have experienced adversity.

### ***Jamatkhana***

In addition to the school space, the Jamatkhana had also become a vital place for diverse activities that facilitated not only practicing the faith, but promoted expansion of social networks and learning for the Afghan children to further build and sustain resilience. The Afghan refugee children in my study also had an opportunity to attend tutorial classes organized by the Ismaili community in Edmonton in Jamatkhana twice a week as after-school support.

All the above mentioned supports facilitated the Afghan children to face the challenges of daily living. It is interesting to note in chapter six that the children verbalized the challenges of daily living faced in Canada as causing tensions while those faced in Pakistan as an adventurous journey. This is probably because the Afghan refugee children were younger when they entered Pakistan



and that they were not restricted, as they were in Afghanistan, to stay inside the house or from going to school because of safety. Furthermore, it could probably be that these children have already overcome the challenges they faced in Pakistan and their focus is now of dwelling in the present in Canada.

### **Challenges and Tensions of Daily Living on the Journey**

Azim said: “*It is hard*” and Izzat echoes that, “*it is hard but I can do it as I have lots of teachers [in the school and in the community] to help me.*”

Despite the ease with which the children accessed resources for support in Canada, they faced several challenges such as keeping up with schoolwork, making friends, and adjusting to geographic distance from relatives and friends. All of these challenges created tensions in the lives of these children that needed to be addressed and overcome. The Afghan children talked in great length about the challenges of adapting to the Canadian school system.

### ***Keeping Up with School Work***

As soon as the Afghan refugee children entered the shores of Canada they had to take English as Second Language (ESL) classes. The Afghan children went through an assessment process for a full year before they were placed in an appropriate grade. Therefore, they had to take subjects offered in two different grades in the same year simultaneously. The children had taken English classes in the transitional country of Pakistan so they had acquired the basic language skills to enable them to communicate in English. However, they had to build upon those skills in order to learn various subjects taught in English and adapt to unfamiliar accent and teaching strategies.

Azim voiced that he had trouble in understanding Social Studies. My analysis was that Azim's language barrier was influencing his ability to incorporate the task at hand rather than the subject itself. This is how he explained his challenge:

Right now [thinking pause] well the only problem is Social. [Also] I cannot multi-task, I am slow in English. I am getting better at it but not that much good. The teacher gives you something on the overhead, and as he is giving the notes on the overhead he [also] explains it [to] you. Like OK! So what do you do? Take the notes first or you listen to the teacher first. . . . [It is] kind of hard for me. It is difficult for me to do that. It is kind of easy for the students who are born in Canada and they know to speak in English. I cannot do that. Like if I read University, I have to put that in my mind [first] so that I know how to spell it U-NI-VER-SI-TY and like you know . . . people here when they [read] University, they just forget about it and they can spell it and can listen [at the same time] and just write down the stuff but I can't.

I asked Azim what could be done in addressing his challenge. He responded:

Well! I went to my teacher [of Grade 9] and told her that I have this problem [about Social Studies] and how can I be helped out. The teacher was like, 'the only way I can help you [is if you] tell me whatever you don't understand.' But boy! I do not understand anything so do I come everyday? . . . the teacher was not helping properly [pause]. . . . Like now there is this kid that goes to my school, he is Afghan too, who comes to the same Jamatkhana and he is in Grade 10 too but his Social is low . . . [I like to work with] someone who is the same as me or a little bit high, there [are] still people from University that come to Khane that I told you [that] help us there . . . [thinking pause] I do not know, I want someone to help me like the teacher helps, [because] the teacher teaches one way and [the person from the community] teaches differently.

Azim has identified a gap between his teachers' expectation, his own understanding and comprehension of the subject, and the assistance being provided by the community volunteers. Participating in class or approaching the

teacher for assistance can be very intimidating and this would cause further tensions. Azim compared learning the subject of ‘Social Studies’ in Pakistan to Canada. Together we discussed and identified strategies that would facilitate further learning. Azim continued to invest a lot of time in understanding the content of the subject by seeking assistance from his teachers in school and in the community. Despite the above challenges, coupled with the fact that English is not Azim’s first language, he worked hard to adapt and survive these challenges. Azim demonstrated strong inner strength by approaching the teachers at the school and in the community to overcome the barriers. The result was that he passed grade 10 including Social Studies.

Devjee (2008) in her study with seven refugee children between the ages of 16-19 years from five different countries (Afghanistan, Burundi, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, and Somalia) also found that they had difficulty in understanding the subject of Social Studies as it was taught from the context of Canadian and European ways of life. In addition to having problems with the English language, these refugee children did not have the previous experience of learning the various subjects in Canada and they were expected to learn the content at a higher level. Moreover, Devjee also identified that some of these refugee students did not have any additional support after school hours even if they had problems with the subject matter and therefore may not be motivated to learn. This lack of support for academic progress sets these refugee children up for a failure (Devjee, 2008). In comparison to the above mentioned study the Afghan children in my study

adapted to the school system and progressed academically because of the extra tutoring provided by the Ismaili community.

Izzat also shared her challenges in school. This is how she explained:

Uhm! First of all Science was difficult but then when I got into 'Bio' I find it so interesting, like studying about human being and those kinds of things. So interesting and I did really good on it. I really have interest in Bio. But any chapter on English and Math, maybe [is] hard like drawing but I have too much interest in Bio. On math I find it a little bit difficulty because I took applied Math and then I took pure Math.

Even though Izzat may not have had proactive guidance from a school counselor, she was able to focus on her interest in Biology to overcome the difficulty with the remaining Science subjects. She also ended up repeating Math to obtain a better understanding of pure Math principles. Izzat's "*I can do it*" attitude led her to register for the Math course and face with her problems by working hard and getting support from friends, teachers in school and in the community. In addition the encouragement from her parents led her to successfully overcome her challenges successfully. Izzat also voiced that her non-Ismaili Afghan colleagues in school did not register for Science subjects because they did not have the extra supports available to them.

Gulshan, another research participant of this study received an award for reaching her milestone in school. According to researchers (Luthar, et al., 2000; Mangham et al., 1995; Masten, 2001) Azim, Izzat, and Gulshan could be called resilient as their perseverance and the available external supports led them to adapt positively and face the adversity encountered in school. The other four children in this study were also doing well in school with support from teachers

and counselors. They were fully aware and confident that if they needed help after school they could access community support. All of the research participants voiced accomplishment of a milestone of school adjustment (Riley & Masten, 2005) and were looking forward to their future career goals. These children were also aware that there would be more challenges to face as they succeeded into higher grades.

### *Making New Friends*

As established in the literature, children going through adolescence face a number of challenges in their transition to adulthood. This period tends to involve experimentation, risk-taking behaviors, and reflection on a sense of personal identity. It can also be a time when parental boundaries are pushed and family conflict can occur (Merali, 2004). This gets further complicated when children are uprooted from their familiar surroundings and are forced to make new friends in a strange environment. In Azim's words:

As we grow up . . . we get the experience being [separated from close friends] and yeah you get so much stress when we are like getting old. You might not [have difficulty] when you are a kid. I mean it is tough [to make friends] like in grade 7, 8 or 9.

In addition, being a refugee in a new culture carries its own set of stresses as identified by Azim. He faced difficulty making the right friends at school in Canada after moving from the transitional country of Pakistan and his homeland. He also talked about the dilemma of wanting to spend more time with his only best friend who was expelled from school. His parents were aware of his friend's predicament and therefore he was forbidden to make any contacts with his buddy.

He realized that his parents meant well but at the same time, he really missed his friend. He was torn between listening to the guidance of his parents and following what his heart desired. This conflict impacted his ability to make new friends at school thus compounding his feelings of loneliness.

Azim kept in touch with his friends at work and at the prayer place to compensate for the desire to meet his best friend. He knew that he should be concentrating on his studies and should not be making any attempt to go against the wishes of his parents. He also internalized the consequences of meeting his best friend as it would jeopardize his future and realized that the right thing to do was not to meet his best friend. Azim clearly showed his ability to problem solve and make decisions for what he believed to be good for his future even though he was tempted to continue meeting his best friend.

### ***Adjusting to Geographic Distance from Relatives and Friends***

Entering the shores of Canada was a favorable experience as the Afghan refugee children and their families got an opportunity to live in a peaceful country. However, given the nature of residential accommodation in Canadian society it was impossible for all the refugee families to dwell within the same neighborhood as was the case in Pakistan. Why did this change create tension for the Afghan refugee children? In Azim's words:

My friends went to the same school yeah! And we lived in the same place [neighborhood] too [in Pakistan], but in Canada one person lives on the north side and another person lives on the south side, but us we were like close neighbors, [in Pakistan] so we were together like all the time, from the day till the night and sometimes we used to sleep together and tell each other stories, jokes and we would laugh.

Azim further elaborated that,

. . . like you know here [in Canada] you have television and stuff and [still] there is no fun in it. There [in Pakistan] we had only a small TV like 6 inches like small TV and there was like 7 and 8 kids sitting and watching it but there was fun watching it. Like now [in Canada because of the distance] you go alone and watch movie in the theatre.

Making friends in Canada was not a problem. What mattered was the quality of the friendship that often seemed lacking due to different situations.

Azim missed the sheer closeness of sitting with one another to watch a tiny TV.

Azim loved to talk of his friends and memories through *photo conversation* and our conversations gave him strong and lovely memories most of the time.

Yeah! Like I met many friends here [in Canada] but they [Pointing to the picture of friends in Pakistan] were very sincere that I had with them but I do not know, I tried really hard but I did not have that kind of relationship here [in Canada as in Pakistan], you cannot get it back. First of all I have friends and I am living here and the other friend lives on the other side of the mall and I only meet him in school that's all like, those kinds of stuff, many problem like that and there are some friends I meet only in Jamatkhana and that is all. (Azim)

Although Azim has managed to make friends both in the school and at the prayer place he still misses his best Canadian friend and the ones in Pakistan. He has found comfort in his memories of the happy and joyful times experienced during the ten years he spent in Pakistan. For example, living at a walking distance from his friends facilitated studying and socializing with them. The nostalgic memories of flying kites, watching television and helping each other to progress academically carried him through periods of yearning for them.

Meera, another participant related that when she was sick she could not stay at home because there was no one to care for her. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, she always had someone to look after her at home. She also missed playing with her cousins and friends in Pakistan every day. Therefore, she looked forward to visiting family friends every weekend as she could play with the other children in the family.

### **Findings from Selected Studies with Refugees or Immigrant Children**

The question that must be asked now, is why the findings of this study differ so much from other studies on refugee children. An obvious answer might be the homogeneity of the study, as they were all from the same background, coming through Pakistan to settlement spaces there, then to Canada in the hands of the Ismaili community. It could also be said that the connector chose the families that were doing well and that the connector was biased. The connector did find that many of the Afghan families he invited to the study, did not want to participate because of fear of repercussions in the future and this also limited involvement. They all came from a traumatized background. Also it could be pondered that because I am a member of the Ismaili community, the families spoke only positively about their experiences. I do know the parents did not give any instructions to the child when I was speaking with the children or put any limitations on them. As stated before, some families stayed in the same room and others left the room if there was another room to go to.



In speaking to these statements above, I found the children delightful and not holding back with me. They took me to their rooms to show holiday photos, photos for trips back to Afghanistan, photos of their family members. They marveled at how their mother and father looked in Afghanistan, how they looked so small and young in the photos, how they loved to look at the tiny fingers and toes of the babies in the photos. They spoke of loving to play and sometimes finding it hard to find playing spaces, but then they described how they did play. Hardships were mainly the language and the schooling, but both of these were supplemented by the Ismaili community. Going to the prayer place also gave them the opportunity to speak to other Afghan children, to be warned sometimes by other children not to spend time with certain students in the school, to receive tutoring, and such as already described. I also found that they were so happy I had been to the places they came from, that I could speak the Urdu and some Farsi language as well as other dialects, and it is from this view they spoke to me. A non- Ismaili person who did not have an understanding or familiarity with their place of origin might not have been so successful in hearing about their activities of daily life, but perhaps they would have had the children speak to the horrors of war more than they did to me. But honestly, I don't think so. These children are busy dwelling in their new home in Canada, trying to cope with their day-to-day struggles of living, facing challenges in school, things to do, and accomplish.

All of the children in this study were between the ages of two and five when they left Afghanistan with their families because of war in their country.

Consistent with the findings of the study of refugee children of war who settled in Canada (Berman, 1999; Berman et al., 2001; Devjee, 2008), most children used innovative strategies to survive and showed strength in spite of facing adversities. The challenges that the refugee children faced were adjusting to school, culture, and language in a new country. In addition they do not remember the actual events and the intensity of the danger they faced but heard it from their parents and relatives. But it was not so much the subject of their conversation. They were very clear that the most consistent support was from their families.

The challenge of adjusting to the school system and trying to cope with ESL could not only affect the grades of refugee children but make them prone to demotivation and dropping out of school if appropriate assistance is not given on time (Devjee, 2008). This also affects their future.

According to Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) children are at a greater risk of developing mental illness if exposed to more than two adverse factors depending on the extent and type of exposure. Compounding the risks, Afghan refugee women face economical and occupational problems as well as accessibility to health care that could further affect their physical and psychological well being (Lipson & Omidian, 1997) as well as the health of their children. If adults in the family do not get the appropriate support then they cannot protect the children (Garbarino & Kostelny).

Therefore, there are chances for children to develop PTSD. Furthermore, children who live in refugee camps do not get consistent support due to the lack

of material and financial resources (Halimi, 2002). According to Joshi and O'Donnell (2003) not all children exposed to traumatic events will develop PTSD. Several researchers (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner, 1989, 1993) have identified that protective factors such as individual traits or attributes, family and community support act as buffers and promote resilience in children. In this study, the Ismaili community strongly supported the children's parents and this may have acted as an added buffer for the children and their families.

This process of buffering goes a long way to prevent an accumulation of stress that could lead to effective coping. This attention to diminishing overwhelming stress in a timely manner as stated in chapter one and two results in the development of resilience or positive adaptation (Garbarino et al, 1991) and prevents mental illness (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).

The children in this study showed strength due to the support outlined above, but also challenges, mainly loss of family time due to economic challenges and parents having to work long hours at minimum wages. But in addition they also received consistent support from the Ismaili community both in the transitional country of Pakistan and in Canada and continue to have support to face the adversities that they face on an ongoing basis. In the end I have to say I have reported what the children have said to me and tried to understand based on their conversations, what we can take from their words. For certain I knew they were all working hard, very hard. They had to be vigilant all the time to make

certain they understood the language and acting appropriately and this was tiring. To go to the prayer place, they let out a sigh of great relief. At home, they let out the same sigh as they were nurtured within their family unit.

To return to White's (2005) quote at the beginning of the chapter, human beings have the power to *sustain* other individual beings and to assist them to rebuild and dwell. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper, 2001d), *build* comes from the old English verb *byldan*, which means to *construct a house* [of being] with a strong structure that will hold even during a tornado. However, there are always chances that the structures of a house can be damaged or destroyed if the winds of adversity overcome it. The structure can be rebuilt with strong building materials.

The word *sustain* (Harper, 2001e) comes from the Latin term *sustiner*, which means to *endure* to continue living or be lifted up from the bottom after being crushed. *Endure* (Harper, 2001f) from the Latin word *indurare* is to *harden* against any odds that enter your life world and yet you are still able to bear the circumstances in which you live. Understanding the etymology of these words helps us to see how consistent and timely support strengthens these children to build and re-build again. In the previous chapters, their conversation was constantly around learning to live and survive in changing circumstances.

Returning to the two conditions required for gaining resilience and strength in one's life, these children did speak of adversity, of challenges, and

they did speak about learning to dwell and live well even though experiencing hard conditions (Luthar et al, 2000).

### **Summary**

The Afghan children in this study have shown that their burdens became lighter or easier to carry from the numerous supports they were given from the time they left Afghanistan. Life still held tensions and hardships, but somehow they were able to take them in their stride and work them through. The consistent support of human and material resources from the Ismaili community played a major role in sustaining their life-worlds. The children experienced sound foundational support in the form of family, friends and community. They internalized the concept of *brotherhood* in Islam and the unitary soul which gave them the courage to approach individuals for help. They also volunteered their time to serve the community. In addition, they also showed a very positive outlook on their future and were motivated to pursue their dreams. The Afghan children treasure their cultural identity and expressed confidence in learning to understand other cultures of their new country. While coping with extensive school work, making new friends, and dealing with geographic distance, these children are confident that they can move forward with their lives by achieving their personal and career goals in Canada.

When I write about these experiences the children have shared with me, I cannot easily put in words all they have said and not said to me. I too have lived through adversity. But I felt that while we were talking often about important and

happy things, there was a long trail in the journey of challenges that these children had overcome. Each thing they talked about had a history of change, of new situations that were not easy to relate and more. Their house of resilience they built was hard work. I cannot express this enough.

In the concluding chapter I will bring everything together to understand the living experiences of these Afghan children. I will also discuss limitations of this study and suggestions that may aid for future research studies and my own growth in the process of conducting this research.

As stated earlier, my study is an exploratory study describing the experiences of Afghan children in the aftermath of war through *photo conversations* in order to understand how the children gain resiliency. Therefore, I prefer to discuss and analyze the nature of supports available to the Afghan children both in Pakistan and Canada and what it meant to them.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: BRINGING EVERYTHING TOGETHER

In this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening. In the order of values, they both constitute a community of memory and image. Thus the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-operate and retain the treasures of former days. (Bachelard, 1964, p. 5)

Bachelard (1964) above writes about the precious life time memories of a being that are contained in a house. The house one builds is a place where all past and present dwelling spaces are bound together to give the house shape as well as form a deeper meaning within each individual. These memories are treasured within the core of the being of the children and therefore reawakened when needed for action and/or further comfort, on reflection with each new experience. Heidegger (1971), discussed earlier, writes that the oneness of the *four fold* (earth, sky, divinities and mortals) gathers on the bridge. But he is careful to point out that the bridge “is a thing of its own kind; for it gathers the fourfold in such a way that it allows a site for it . . . the bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge” (Heidegger, p.154). Heidegger emphasizes that building a bridge is a *process* of learning how to be in the world, in this study’s case, in several different worlds. The bridge is not already there; rather the bridge comes into being through learning to dwell in differing spaces. Combining the thoughts of the two philosophers Bachelard and Heidegger in relation to the children in this study, we understand that a strong house only comes into existence through continuous hard and difficult work.

Therefore it is important that we listen to the voices of the Afghan refugee children and their needs for the requirement of consistent supports to strengthen their future livelihoods.

The overarching themes that emerged from the findings of this study are: (a) cherishing the family, (b) treasuring the Afghan culture, (c) creating opportune spaces to dwell, and (d) building and sustaining resilience. It should be noted that the Afghan children in this study are 1.5 generation as they were born in Afghanistan and came to Canada as refugees with their parents. The second generation children are those that are “born in Canada, whose parents moved across national and territorial boundaries to settle in a new world” (Hebert, Wilkinson, & Ali, 2008, p.63). In this chapter I have utilized the studies done by researchers on second generation children as their experiences are similar to the children in this study.

Following I discuss the overarching themes. Similarities in this study to existing literature are included in research reflections discussed under each theme. I also highlight the findings in terms of what is new in this study. I then discuss recommendations for what could inform or serve as a guide for research, practice, education, and policy development including implications for nursing education and practice at the level of the children, their families, and the community at large. Following these discussions I will provide a final overview of the research process and limitations of the study with some concluding thoughts.



## Discussion of Overarching Themes

### *Cherishing the Family and Treasuring the Afghan Culture*

*Cherishing the family and treasuring the Afghan culture* evolved as two separate themes in my study, but because of its interconnectedness of one influencing the other, I will address them together. The notion of *lifeworld* (van Manen, 1997) of the Afghan children seen in this study is related to the importance of each member in the whole family unit living in varied spaces around the globe. As discussed in chapter four, individuals that formed the family unit from the perspective of the children were parents [mother and father], siblings, grandparents [grandmother and grandfather], nephews and nieces, uncles, aunts, pets, and family friends, neighbors, teachers, and counselors. All these family members were not only Afghans but also non-Afghans and they may or may not be Ismaili Muslims. They were all beings belonging to one soul and dwelling in diverse earth suits (Zukav, 2000).

The Afghan children drew on the strength of their family members to overcome their every day struggles in life. Access to housing promoted physical, psychological, and spiritual advancement. The strong ties with family members in good and bad times kept them grounded with a sense of resourceful strength and provided a spring board of resilience to face adversities. Furthermore, family members ensured that the children continued to embrace their Afghan culture.

It is important to note that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) recognizes and promotes the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society, and

acknowledges the freedom of all its members, to be able to maintain, enhance, and share their cultural heritage. Although the Afghan refugee children in this study were confronted with the new culture, the multicultural Canadian policy facilitated them to promote a sense of identity through close-knit families, embracing the Afghan dress, dance, music, and volunteering, which also facilitated social inclusion. The challenges identified by the Ismaili Afghan children in this study include retaining their language, family time together in a busy society, and understanding other cultures.

Children not only have to learn empirical (think and do) ways in a new culture, they also have to constantly be interpreting what is going on in the society and culture, and how to therefore act (Aoki, 1990). They also had to be vigilant and watchful almost every minute. Education and life experiences enabled these Afghan children to demonstrate this continual getting up and trying again. In addition, I believe the strengths of their family ties and consistent support made these children resilient.

***Research reflections.*** Similar to the findings in this study, other studies have also found that; 1) parental support is important for resettlement of refugee children in Canada ( Parkins, 2004); 2) mothers give hope to their children by acting as problem solvers and as advisors (Parkins, 2004); 3) fathers also play a nurturing role in the family but in a different way (Friedman et al., 2003; Crockett et al., 2007); 4) grandparents are valued for taking care of grandchildren (Kanji et al., 2007; Weine et al., 2004); 5) siblings support each other (Kim et al., 2006);

6) support from extended family members is beneficial (Bacallo & Smokowski, 2007; Falicov, 2007; Parra-Cardona et al., 2006); 7) children and pets have a unique bond between them (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006); 8) respect is given to elders (Dupree, 2002); 9) family time spent together is valued (Daly, 1966) as well as fulfilling family obligations (Dupree, 2002); 10) identity is maintained through cultural dress, dance, (Dupree, 2002; Fan, 2008; Hones, 1999); language, (Dupree, 2002), and through art (Hones, 1999) as well as integrating into the Canadian culture (Ramji, 2008); 11) community togetherness is enhanced through volunteering thereby contributing towards the society, and being a good citizen (Aga Khan, 1998; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008; Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007). Furthermore, 92 second generation Canadian Muslims (aged 18 to 27) were found to be content “with a variety of identity dimensions in their lives, those of their Islamic faith, those of their parents’ ethnic cultural heritage and those of Canadian culture” (Ramji, 2008, p. 105).

The west or the industrialized world is perceived as an individualistic society and citizens are compelled to compete in order to get ahead and individually own things for material comfort. There is pressure to have a home of your own and all the furnishings and such, which as written before, means the parents, have to work harder, which decreases the family time. In addition to family support, continual embracing of one’s own culture gives confidence and a sense of unique self-worth to stand up and be proud to be an Afghan. The children in this study have shown valuing their cultural identity. What is not clearly

evident is whether Canadian institutions have built on this foundation to provide optimum assistance to maintain the treasuring of their culture. At this point in their lives, these children need their culture and see the value of it in their daily lives and they are striving to maintain it.

The Afghan children in this study were quite adept at integrating with both Pakistani and Canadian cultures as well as embracing their own values, language, and traditions. This is not always easy since it is also important to understand the new culture and be accepted. But somehow we must find a way to help these children retain a treasure box of their culture because it nourishes their being. What determines the level of success is how effectively their existing and new cultures are integrated. For example, an Afghan child may prefer to buy name brand clothing to fit into the Canadian culture, but may not be as comfortable in giving up the Afghan culture of interdependence of the family unit. These Afghan children also continue to speak Farsi at home. According to Birman and Trickett (2001), there are more chances that assimilation will occur after an individual lives in a host country for more than five years. If these children move toward an individualistic way of being, which is not the Afghan culture, they could lose the most important support of the family members in their lives. Fuligini (2001) argues that individual and group differences in children are often gathered from cross-sectional studies and therefore limits understanding of their experiences in the new society over time.

**Further research** is required to study first and second generation Afghan refugee children living in Canada to observe if the children transform themselves into an individualist way of being from an interdependent way of dwelling with their family or if they uniquely retain their childhood way of integrating both.

**Long term research** with Afghan children from different generations throughout their development would enhance the understanding of how to facilitate them to continue to embrace their own culture as well as integrate into the Canadian culture in order to sustain resilience in these children.

### *Creating Opportune Spaces to Dwell*

All seven Ismaili Afghan refugee children in this study considered every environment even if it was challenging as an opportune space to dwell (Arthur, Chaves, Este, Frideres, & Hrycar, 2008). They voiced that the school spaces in Canada provided an opportunity to continue with their educational goals, make friends and create strong bonds. The second generation adolescents in high schools in three Canadian cities, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Toronto, demonstrated strong attachments to their homes through photographs, drawings, writings, and interviews. They were also very attached to the good education system in schools which provide them “with human and social capital in the form of connections, support and sources of understanding themselves and the world around them” (Hebert et al., 2008, p.63).

Jamatkhana space offers the Afghan children a space to practice their faith peacefully as well as build more resourceful support and social networks. The

speeches and guidance from their spiritual leader also played a very important role in motivating the parents to encourage their children to aim high with respect to their future goals. Moreover, the children themselves followed the advice given by their spiritual leader. The Ismaili community continues to hold religious camps with the youth where they discuss all kinds of issues to encourage them to broaden their horizons as the sky is limitless. Individuals in the neighborhood, school, and community also contributed in assisting the Afghan families to settle in Pakistan and Canada.

In terms of integrating into Canadian culture, for these seven children, they spoke mainly of school providing social interaction with other children of their own age (Hones, 1999). They also spoke about how much they valued speaking English with Canadian people in order to understand them. In addition, the counselors, principals, and teachers provide assistance to overcome problems in school. Moreover, similar to the parents of Afghan refugee children in this study, other immigrant parents also want their children to take advantage of education and to do their best in school (Hones, 1999). The question that needs to be posed persistently: Is there enough assistance available for these refugee children in order for them to succeed academically at a level that enhances their career goals as well as contribute to the society in the future?

**Research reflection.** Similar to the findings in this study, other studies have also found that, 1) school provides learning, a routine for children, and a space to make friends (Hek, 2005; Machel, 2001; Pooley et al., 2008); 2) success

at school depends on how much support and type of assistance is provided by teachers and administrators (Szente & Hoot, 2007); 3) attention given to English language acquisition leads to success in school (Stewart, 2005); 4) prayer place (jamatkhana) provides a space for practicing faith as well as for social activities or networking (Hones, 1999; Nanji, 1983); and, 5) children learn through play (Derr, 2006) and through interaction with the environment (Derr, 2006).

Experiencing the atrocities of war forced the families of these children to seek safe spaces in another land away from home. The children with support from the family and community searched for opportune dwelling spaces that helped them explore the meaning of living in the *fourfold*. Each precious memory of opportune spaces provided favorable winds which carried the children to a new dwelling place creating a deeper meaning of living and equipping them to face further challenges. **Further research** on refugee children would facilitate an understanding of more opportune spaces that would continue to let these children thrive. The tender age of children who experienced such war and change cannot be lumped into other refugee children coming with different experiences. They must be grouped with others who have witnessed such continual war and violence and threats to life. Also, the experience of Ismaili Afghan refugee children might be very different from other Afghan refugee children and other non-Afghan refugee children.

The Ismaili Afghan refugee children have identified the difficulties that they are experiencing in the Canadian school system. This is specifically

applicable to those children who have started their education process outside Canada and need to be integrated with mainstream children. Further **long term research study** could focus on critical analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of using specific resources in order to determine the gaps in their basic education, implementing strategies for filling those gaps and then integrating them with the mainstream children.

### ***Building and Sustaining Resilience***

Resilience is the ability to cope and respond positively to the stresses of adversity (Arthur, et al., 2008; Maegusuku-Hewett, Dunkerley, & Smalley, 2007). Walsh (1998) describes resilience in families as the “capacity to rebound from adversity, strengthened and more resourceful” (p. 4). She further elaborates that individuals cope with crisis or hardships by making meaning of the experiences and linking them to the social world, cultural and religious beliefs as well as hopes and dreams in the future. Miller and Harvey (2001) argue that individuals reflect on their strength and sense of self-worth after they have coped with loss or adversities in their lives. To summarize, these authors identify that coping with adversities led to psychological strength so they could face the challenges before them in the new world. This in turn, made them more resilient to face future adversities. Although the Afghan children and their families faced adversities, it should be noted that children and their families need constant support of human and material resources in building and sustaining their resilience. Black and Lobo (2008) reviewed family research literature and identified family time, shared



recreation, and support networks as important resilient factors of families. The children in this study shared their experiences of the above mentioned resilient factors.

The children themselves shared a positive outlook for their future which demonstrated that these children are resilient. They also showed courage by having a ‘*can do*’ attitude even if it meant repeating a subject that was required to pursue their future aspirations (Maegusuku-Hewett et al., 2007). These children are encouraged by their family members to be successful in education as it is a “key to their successful adulthood” (Maegusuku-Hewett et al., 2007, p. 315). In addition to their mother tongue, the children learnt multiple languages to survive in Pakistan and in Canada. Even though the children had a busy life trying to balance work at home, school, and earning a living they still found time to volunteer to care for the elderly and clean the Jamatkhana space. The Afghan children treasured their culture, and seemed to have retained their identity. This has given them confidence to begin integrating with the new culture.

The families of these Afghan children were given a welcoming environment by the Ismaili community, a place to live, and an orientation to the policies and services available to settle them in Pakistan and Canada. In addition, networks of people were also available for providing any kind of support required to facilitate the family and their children to adjust to Canada quickly. These kinds of invaluable supports enabled them to face their challenges in a meaningful way.

**Research reflection.** Similar to the findings in this study, other studies have also found that, 1) adversities of war include homelessness, loss of opportunity for education and other material resources (Berry et al., 2003; Halimi, 2002; Machel, 2001); 2) diverse supports from parents, extended family members, an adult, the community, and institutional structure (school) builds resilience (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Garmezy, 1991; Luthar et al., 2000; Machel, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998); and, 3) positive attitudes and source of meaning through practicing faith or prayers, music, and art builds and sustains reliance (Joseph, 1994; Hestyanti, 2006; MacKinlay & Trevitt, 2007; Walsh, 2003).

What was different about the Afghan children in this study is that they had the consistent support not only of their nuclear and extended family members, but also from the Ismaili community right from the time they landed in the transitional country of Pakistan and continued in Canada that facilitated them to look for opportunity in each space that they dwelled.

Masten and Powell (2003) have developed a resilience framework for research, policy and practice for promoting and sustaining resilience in children. It is not practical to apply a western framework fully to the experiences of the Afghan children as it is not a '*made to fit*' framework. It would hide, shadow, or cover the true experiences of a human life. These researchers have suggested assessing both ends of a spectrum, positive and negative, as a starting point to utilize multiple strategies for redirecting changes constructively. For example, according to Masten and Powell (2003), reducing exposure to risks prevents

adversity. However, it was not always possible as these Afghan children and their families had to travel through the *war-torn* country to move to a safer place. If they had not taken the risk of leaving the country for safety, it would have increased the risks leading to further adversities (Masten & Powell). It is understandable that adversities are likely to cause PTSD or nightmares in children as highlighted by Pfefferbaum (1997). The children in my study reveal through *photo conversations* that they were able to overcome the day-to-day problems in school with the help of their friends, teachers, parents, siblings, and individuals in the Ismaili community. In addition, these Afghan children escaped many adversities of war due to the consistent supports and therefore did not suffer from PTSD or any other mental illness and were resilient. This does not mean that they will remain resilient at all times.

Refugee children who do not get a lot of support in overcoming hurdles of daily life are prone to lose interest in their studies or in pursuing a career, which affects their future livelihoods (Devjee, 2008). However if the children continue to have support and keep on building additional support networks, based on the findings of this study, they will be able to sustain resilience and overcome future adversities. The learning is not to underestimate the children's ability to survive and find even in the worst spaces, a place to play in the *fourfold* and become strong. **Further long term research** with refugee children in different host countries would enable us to understand innovative ways of continuing to support them to sustain resilience. In this study, it is clear that these children benefited

from the support of the religious community. Therefore, connecting families with groups for support whether religious or secular, is extremely important to build and sustain resilience.

**Recommendations and Further Thoughts: Education, Practice,  
and Policy Development**

If we truly want to make a difference in the lives of refugee children we may consider the issues exemplified by the children themselves as implications for education, practice and policy development. Following are the recommendations:

1. *Things that I personally reflected upon* after listening to the children along with reading the literature associated with this study are: (a) not to undermine children but to capitalize on their nature of flexibility and how they overcome adversities and adapt to new environments, (b) to use unique techniques to listen to the voices of children such as *photo conversations*; (c) to provide a safe and non-threatening environment in which to identify their needs; (d) to collaborate with the civil society which includes volunteers that act as support systems to attend to their needs; (e) to give importance to the interdependence of family; (f) to strengthen the skills of the facilitators and counselors to work with refugee children; and (g) to acknowledge and facilitate refugee children to integrate with other cultures in the new country.
2. The specific issue identified by these children was that there was a language barrier despite being taught ESL in schools. The Afghan children in this

study identified challenges of adapting to the school system in Canada which include (a) learning the English language, (b) understanding the Canadian accent, (c) adjusting or coping with being placed in two grades in one year, (d) doing homework, and (e) getting used to a variety of teaching strategies utilized by the instructors for learning.

3. The current practice of placing children in a specific grade/class in a school in Canada was difficult for three of the oldest children in this study. One recommendation would be to re-visit this practice with the children placed in these grades and discuss alternate practices perhaps more suited to the individual child.

Some of the frustrations expressed by the Afghan children in this study were similar in comparison to the findings in Devjee's (2008) study on refugee children currently living in Edmonton. For example, the Afghan refugee children in my study were also assigned to a specific grade/class in schools based on their age regardless of their educational background, which caused stress. In contrast, the refugee children in Devjee's study did not have extra tutorial support from any community, whereas the Afghan refugee children in my study had consistent tutorial support. The lack of consistent support in the community may have led to children being de-motivated in the Devjee study. Also, having been placed in an inappropriate grade has led to lower scores or failure in a subject, which affects choosing a career or entry to a university in future (Devjee, 2008).

High academic performance of students in schools is vital in order to pursue a university degree and then be able to expand opportunities of better paying employment to secure the future for themselves. These children will be able to build a new life for themselves, their families, as well as contribute towards the society. Educational support must maximize the potential of refugee children to participate successfully in their educational endeavor.

4. Because the children in this study were received by an existing community within the Canadian society, the children were able to adjust better than refugee children who do not have the same reception. I recommend that the Government of Canada could investigate best practices from existing community models to enhance their current model of assisting refugee children. One such practice could focus on a collaborative model for intervention as described below.

Lack of material and financial resources is consistently identified as a reason for not being able to give appropriate support to refugees (Machel, 2001). An innovative strategy would be to support civil society organizations to overcome this deficiency so that each human being could have a dignified life. This has been articulated by His Highness the Aga Khan (2008), the Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims whose central focus for half a century has been cross-cultural interaction and dealing with issues of community well being. He reiterates that the government alone cannot fulfill the demands of its citizens and therefore it requires collective initiatives from civil society organizations to do so. One such example is of AKDN. He elaborated that the

civil society includes, “institutions that operate on a private, voluntary basis but are driven by public motivations and to research. They include commercial, labor, professional, and ethnic associations as well as entities devoted to maintaining health, protecting the environment and curing disease” (p. 107). In addition, the media and religious institutions are central to civil society. If all the institutions in collaboration with the government in each country take it as their obligation to assist the refugee children in every way they can, then there is bound to be success.

Another strategy of pooling resources is the example given by Wane (2005) from the experience of African indigenous ways of organization known as *communal solidarity*. The African traditional social groups and clans work together as they consider it a social obligation to protect and support each other holistically. In Kenya “this mutual assistance has been conceptualized nationally to form what is known as “Harambee” - “Let’s pull together”” (p. 40).

Based on the above identified needs and my *photo conversations* with these children, I recommend the following:

5. To continue to focus on one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in smaller groups with refugee children. The participants in this study informed me that the above method of tutoring was a great help in adjusting to their studies.
6. To develop bridging programs that will facilitate a smooth transition, like the school system organized by the Ismaili community in Pakistan, referred to by

these children, that helped them master the language, and have better success. For example, Gulshan said that this enhanced her academic performance.

7. To provide a forum for collaboration between students, volunteers, parents and institutions to discuss strategies to facilitate learning, understanding, and respecting each others' cultures. The presence of translators would contribute to the success of the forum. While this recommendation was not told to me or demonstrated by the children in this study, I had this thought when the children were speaking about how much they enjoyed the dancing and camping trips when other Canadians joined them.

8. Teachers could use a combination of teaching methods that are easier for students to follow thereby enhancing students' learning. As Azim stated, overhead transparencies did not help him learn in class and he himself had some ideas to overcome this, such as not having to copy the notes while listening to the teacher.

### **Implications for Nursing Education and Practice**

9. As identified in Chapter two, the literature on children who have experienced adversities of war paint a very grim picture of its effect on their mental health. However, the Afghan children in this study did not speak about this through *photo conversations* with me. Based on this literature and my reflection on all aspects of undertaking this study, I would suggest, that **health care professionals** when caring for refugee children from war-torn countries, should listen to the voices of the children by letting the children themselves identify their needs. In addition, what I learned from my participants is that Afghan children



could benefit by assessment of available supports from the context of the individual, the family, the community including the wider networks.

10. Nursing curriculum in all programs should include the concept of learning holistic care of children and their families affected by conflict and war as physical, emotional, and social aspects are all interrelated. This knowledge will create awareness of the needs of their clients.

11 Concentrated approaches for supporting the parents through health promotion activities must be a significant part of health programming and assessment of families. In nursing curricula health promotion must be integrated into all teaching and learning concerning refugee children from war-torn countries as we have experiential evidence in this study, that if refugee parents are supported, then children do well.

12. Nurses should collectively advocate for the health of children affected by war and playing a vital role in politics to work out strategies for peace globally.

13. Nurses should continue to carry the responsibility “to promote health, prevent disease, and alleviate suffering call[s] for the expression of caring for humanity and environment through political activism at local, national, and international levels to bring about reforms of the current global economic order” (Falk-Rafael, 2006, p. 2).

### **Summarizing the Research Process in This Study**

This research project was initially envisioned from my own lived experiences of facing the adversities of poverty. It was then expanded to

*understanding experiences of resilience through photo conversations with Ismaili Afghan refugee children* when I witnessed the little girl in Afghanistan carrying the pail of water for her family. Seeing this little girl resonated within me in a way that cannot be held in the words of any of the languages I speak.

The purpose of this study became clear to me over time, that children need an opportunity to share stories of their life experiences. We need to understand more, so we can act tactfully around these children, create a hospitable place to nurture them through their hardships, and most of all, understand the nature of the support they need in order for them to flourish. Not only do Afghan refugee children and their families need to build a resilient house of being (Heidegger, 1971) but also one of permanency in the host country. According to Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) most children can survive adversities if adults around them are resourceful and can portray a caring and positive futuristic purpose in life. Therefore, it is also important to support the adults in the family. In this study we see how the Ismaili community worked to make a place of shelter and support for the Ismaili Afghan children and their families, in collaboration/partnership with other governmental and non-governmental agencies in Pakistan and Canada. The exploration and understanding of experiences of the Ismaili Afghan refugee children in the aftermath of war in this study clearly shows how very much *sustained support* is needed for Afghan refugee children to face adversity in the transitional country of Pakistan and to resettle into Canada. In a sense, these community people and agencies were a shepherd of being (Heidegger, 1962). Yet

on the other hand the children still had cultural and social hardships. The children showed us, for example, loss of family time because of the parents having to work many hours away from home and adjusting to geographic distance from relatives and friends.

There is a paucity of descriptive and other research specifically on Afghan refugee children who are currently living in Canada and descriptive research of their experiences in the aftermath of war is sparse. Therefore, there was a dire need for this study. I chose the innovative strategy of *photo conversation*, which has been successfully used by other researchers (Berman et al., 2001; Strack, et al., & Wang et al., 1997) to allow the children to get totally immersed and reflect on the photograph in front of them. Looking at the photographs invoked thoughts of important events pertaining to the picture and beyond. It gave them the opportunity to express themselves and convey their experiences in a safe and non-threatening environment through the *photo conversations*. For some children it also brought back memories of the goals planned previously that were not yet fulfilled due to various reasons and to think about setting new goals and objectives for the future. It also helped them re-collect their past experiences and discuss those experiences in both a close and intense way but also with a little distance at times. Using *photo conversation* as a method enabled us to reach another horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 1960/1989) and a new shared meaning of experiences in the aftermath of war. To give an example, I thought that all refugee children stayed in refugee camps before moving to rental housing.

This was not the case for the Afghan children in this study. Therefore their experiences would be different from those who lived in refugee camps.

As soon as the children and their families came to know that I had worked in Afghanistan in 2002 for over a year, even as recent as August 2008, after the children had moved to Canada, their faces lighted up and they opened up and shared their experiences without holding back. It seemed like I was an insider and a part of their family and the *photo conversations* added to the findings of my study in a manner that I had not envisaged. Another reason that may have contributed to their high level of sharing is that I follow the same faith as they do and that created another common link for us.

The deeper understanding of these experiential accounts of the children enabled me to increase awareness of their situations and make recommendations to serve as a guide for social action in this final chapter. Although knowledge generated through an interpretive inquiry is not envisaged to be generalized, some of the findings may be similar to experiences of other refugee children who are survivors of war.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that I was able to recruit participants only from one agency and one transition country. The one agency was the Ismaili community. Yet the findings of this study facilitated my understanding of the importance of consistent supports required for building and sustaining resilience

in Afghan refugee children. It also provided an example of one community model that was successful for seven children and their families.

If the Afghan refugee children were from different ethnic backgrounds this research study may have had variations in the findings in terms of existence and non-existence of support systems and their influence on building and sustaining resilience. As is standard in qualitative studies, small sample size is often quoted as a limitation and therefore the findings cannot be generalized. However, this study is valid for this group of children and as stated above, the strengths of this Ismaili community model for refugee families could be examined and adopted by other agencies.

Most Afghan parents and head of family do not want to sign any forms and they are very cautious about letting their children out in the general public. This could be an additional reason why the children used family photos, but in truth when I asked them about family photos, they said this was what they wanted to talk about; they were proud of their culture, they were thankful for the support of the Ismaili community, and they found their faith to be sustaining through challenges and happy times.

A final limitation of the study is that perhaps my description of the Edmonton Ismaili community has come across as very idealistic. I based what I wrote on the conversations with the children and myself being of the Ismaili faith. I wanted the reader to understand the elements of this faith to understand the places where the children referred to this community. I also need to state that the

Edmonton Ismaili community has had extensive experience working with refugee families. Yet I know from my experience of living and working in Muslim countries and indeed knowing the situation in Afghanistan today, that conflicts over political situations and power have led Muslim countries to war and violence. I do not in any way try to minimize this fact in this dissertation.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The need for the amount of support required for refugee children cannot be overestimated. The Afghan children thrive due to various reasons. The Afghan culture is interdependent from birth to death. Therefore any effort to build and sustain resilience in Afghan children should be rooted within the context of their family and culture. In relation to education, these Afghan children required more time to get adjusted to the curriculum and the strategies utilized for teaching and learning in schools. They have managed to overcome the hurdles thus far with assistance from teachers in the school system and within the community. This shows that they have the capability and ability to succeed if given the appropriate tools of facilitation. These children are our future leaders and they tell us that accessibility should be considered together with quality of assistance and education. I understand more after this work that the findings from this study may help health care professionals and policy makers to act more tactfully around the Afghan refugee children and to plan programs that address what they identify here. Other refugee children with similar experiences could also gain from the findings of this study.

It is understandable that children experiencing the adversities of war may have many negative experiences but there are some children who remain resilient in spite of facing such adversities. If the same model of consistent supports that the Afghan refugee children received in this study is made available to other refugee children, it may rekindle the spark of hope in building and sustaining resilience thereby reducing the negative consequences. This may not be an easy task but it is not impossible.

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**APPENDIX A: LETTERS OF SUPPORT FOR RECRUITMENT  
OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

AGREEMENT TO SUPPORT Zeenatkhanu Kanji for her study titled:  
Tales of Living: Resilience in Afghan Children

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT,

ISMAILI COUNCIL FOR EDM (Print your name of the agency)

HEREBY agree to support the above named research project as follows:

We understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that consent may be withdrawn at any time. In addition, we understand that participant confidentiality will be maintained.

We also understand that prior to data collection, ethics approval will be obtained from the University of Alberta Health Ethics Research Board (HREB-U of A)

Given the understanding as stated above, we agree to support the proposed research study by facilitating recruitment of Afghan children from the ages of 13-17 with the permission from parents and referring them to the researcher.

If we have any other questions, we know that we can call the researcher or one of the study co-supervisors.

We are very interested in this proposed work and we will strongly support this very important study investigating health and resilience.

Bondali  
Signature of Agency Representative

May 27-2006  
Date

Chairman, Settlement Portfolios  
Title of Agency Representative

Kanji  
Researcher Signature

Our agency would like to receive a study summary when it is finished.  Yes  No

Mailing Address: 9/0 113 FARWELL CLOSE  
EDMONTON, AB T6R 2E4

EDMONTON MENNONITE  
**centre  
 newcomers**

1001, 10th St. 157A Avenue  
 Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5H 4H6  
 Phone: (780) 424-7770 Fax: (780) 424-7736  
[www.emcn.ab.ca](http://www.emcn.ab.ca)

2006 May 17

**Re: Zeenatkhanu Kanji's study *Tales of Living: Resilience in Afghan Children***

I am pleased to express interest in supporting this research work and to offer the resources of Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers and our staff to assist as possible, should all necessary ethics approvals be received for the work.

The project is personally interesting to me from many perspectives: as a person who lived in Afghanistan for several years and has continued in the years since to have some connections to the country and people, as part of the staff of a settlement civil society organization that works with many Afghans in Edmonton, and as a person who has been involved with research using photography with children and with the issue of resilience/hope. EMCN is the site of the Centre for Survivors of Torture and Trauma as well, one of three internationally accredited locations for therapeutic services to survivors of torture in Canada.

Facilitating recruitment of Afghan children from the ages of 13-17, with the permission from parents, for the researcher is the assistance I understand is being requested.

If we have questions, we know that we can call the researcher or one of the study co-supervisors. Should there be any questions about our support for the work, I can be contacted at 423-9675 or [jgurnett@emcn.ab.ca](mailto:jgurnett@emcn.ab.ca).

We will be very interested to see the results of the research as well.

Sincerely,



Jim Gurnett  
 Executive Director

**AGREEMENT TO SUPPORT Zeenatkhanu Kanji for her study titled:  
Tales of Living: Resilience in Afghan Children**

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT,

Multicultural Health Brokers Coop (Print your name of the agency)

HEREBY agree to support the above named research project as follows:

We understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that consent may be withdrawn at any time. In addition, we understand that participant confidentiality will be maintained.

We also understand that prior to data collection, ethics approval will be obtained from the University of Alberta Health Ethics Research Board (HREB-U of A)

Given the understanding as stated above, we agree to support the proposed research study by facilitating recruitment of Afghan children from the ages of 13-17 with the permission from parents and referring them to the researcher.

If we have any other questions, we know that we can call the researcher or one of the study co-supervisors.

We are very interested in this proposed work and we will strongly support this very important study investigating health and resilience.

K. Luschten  
Signature of Agency Representative

2/14/06  
Date

Teamleader  
Title of Agency Representative

Z. Kanji  
Researcher Signature

Our agency would like to receive a study summary when it is finished.  Yes  No

Mailing Address: 10867-97 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5H 2N6

# APPENDIX B: HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

## APPROVAL FORM

Health Research Ethics Board

213 Heritage Medical Research Centre  
 University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2G4  
 P: 780.492.9724 (Biomedical Panel)  
 P: 780.492.8102 (Health Panel)  
 P: 780.492.8429  
 P: 780.492.8879  
 F: 780.492.7808

### HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

**Date of HREB meeting:** September 1, 2006

**Name of Applicant:** Dr. Brenda L. Cameron

**Organization:** U of A

**Department:** Faculty of Nursing

**Project Title:** Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation with Afghan Refugee Children

The Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) has reviewed the protocol for this project and found it to be acceptable within the limitations of human experimentation. The HREB has also reviewed and approved the subject information letter and consent form.

The approval for the study as presented is valid for one year. It may be extended following completion of the yearly report form. Any proposed changes to the study must be submitted to the Health Research Ethics Board for approval. Written notification must be sent to the HREB when the project is complete or terminated.

**Special Comments:**



Dr. Glenn Griener, PhD  
 Chair of the Health Research Ethics Board  
 (B: Health Research)

APR - 4 2007

Date of Approval Release

File Number: B-040906



**APPENDIX C: INITIAL INFORMATION LETTER  
AND CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation  
with Afghan Refugee Children**

I would like to invite you to take part in a nursing study that will be conducted by Zeenatkhanu Kanji. She is a doctoral student in nursing department at University of Alberta. I am helping her to make contact with you to find out if your son or daughter is interested to take part in this study.

The purpose of this study is to learn from Afghan children living in Canada, about their experiences of living in hard times after surviving the war in Afghanistan and also the experience of living after the war. How have they dealt with the experiences of hard times? What has been helpful and what has not been helpful? Also, what or who was a support to them and to talk about the problems or struggles that they are facing at present. What can be done to improve the everyday problems that they face? This study is mainly with children.

If you allow your child to take part, two to three meetings to talk with your child will be arranged by Zeenat. The meeting will be in your home or in a place that is convenient for both of you. A disposable camera will be given to your child, who will take photos of what he or she does for one day. He or she will also, take photos of things, celebrations, people, and places that are important to him or her. After developing the pictures, your child will use them during the meeting with Zeenat to describe what they mean to him/her. You do not have to pay for the photographs. Your child can also choose to use photos that he/she already has at home. Your child's name and your family's name will not be revealed to anyone or written in any report. After the meeting, your child can keep a copy of all of the photographs that he/she has taken.

If you allow your child to take part in this study, I can give your name and phone number to Zeenat. She will phone you to arrange a time to meet with you and your daughter/son to explain the study in more detail and to answer your questions. You will be asked to sign an official permission form at this time. If you wish, you may also call Zeenat at 461-4859.

Thank you for taking the time to think about taking part in this important study.

---

Permission given over the telephone  or face-to-face .

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent name and/or head of family      Phone number      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Facilitator name/Signature      Phone number      Date

## بخش ح

## فرم شامل اطلاعات اولیه

## موضوع تحقیق:

تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان افغانی

اینجانب از شما به همکاری در بررسی و مطالعه تحقیقات خانم زینت خانو کاتجی دعوت می نمایم.

خانم زینت خانو کاتجی دانشجوی دکترا در قسمت پرستاری دانشگاه آیرت می باشد. جهت تحقیقات من به ایشان کمک می کنم تا با پسر یا دختر شما تماس حاصل فرمایید. علت این تحقیقات و بررسی تجربه زندگانی بچه های افغانی مقیم کاتادا بعد از جنگ می باشد.

که چگونه می توانند زندگی روزمره خود را شرح بدهند و این بررسی برای بچه های سنین 13 الی 17 می باشد.

اگر شما منمایل و موافق جهت این مطالعه و بررسی باشید در 2 یا 3 جلسه توسط خانم زینت با بچه های شما انجام خواهد گرفت.

کماکان شما هم می توانید در این جلسات حضور داشته باشید مکان جلسات میتواند در خانه، محل کار شما و یا هر جایی که برای شما مقدور باشد برقرار باشد. به هر یک از افراد یک دستگاه دوربین عکسبرداری یکبار مصرف داده خواهد شد که جهت عکسبرداری از مردم مجالس، اماکنی که مهم می باشد عکسبرداری کند و پس از چاپ این عکسها، بچه ها در جلساتی که با خانم زینت خواهند داشت بررسی و مطالعه کنند.

جهت چاپ این عکسها هیچگونه مبلغی دریافت نخواهد شد.

بچه های شما می توانند از عکسهایی که در منزل موجود می باشد استفاده کنند و همچنین بعد از جلسات بچه های شما می توانند کپی از این عکسها را داشته باشند. کلیه حقوق افراد محفوظ می باشد.

اگر به بچه های خود اجازه شرکت در این بررسی را بدهید اسم و تلفن شما را در اختیار خانم زینت قرار خواهیم داد تا او قرار ملاقات یا خانواده شما همراه با پسر یا دخترتان بر قرار نماید.

و به تمام سوالات شما پاسخگو خواهد بود. اطلاعات لازمه نیز در اختیار شما خواهد بود.

همچنین خانم زینت به تمامی سوالهای شما در مورد تحقیقات و بررسی جوابگو خواهد بود.



جهت تمایل از شما درخواست شده است که فرم اجازه نامه امضا شود.

در مورد هرگونه سوال می توانید با شماره 461-4859 با خانم زینت تماس حاصل فرمایید.  
تشکر از اینکه وقت خود را برای تحقیقات و بررسی در اختیار ما گذاشتید.

اجازه از طریق تلفن

حضور

اسم والدین یا سرپرست خانواده -----تلفن-----تاریخ-----

تهیه کننده -----تلفن-----تاریخ-----

اسم شاهد -----تلفن-----تاریخ-----

**APPENDIX D1: PARENT CONSENT FORM PART 1:**

**INFORMATION LETTER AND ASSURANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation  
with Afghan Refugee Children**

**Principle Investigator:** Zeenatkhanu Kanji RN, PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 461-4859

**Supervisor:** Dr. Brenda Cameron, RN, PhD  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 492-6412

**Reason for this Study:** The purpose of this study is to learn from Afghan children about their experiences of living in hard times after surviving the war in Afghanistan and also the experience of living after the war. How they deal with the experiences of hard times? What has been helpful and what has not been helpful? Also, what or who was a support to them and to talk about the problems or struggles that they are facing at present. What can be done to improve the everyday problems that they face? This study is mainly with children. This study is part of my doctoral study in nursing and the information will help me to understand how Afghan refugee children face problems of living in hard times.

**Procedure:** If you agree to give permission to your child to take part in this study, I will arrange two to three meetings to talk with your son/daughter. The meeting will be in your home or in a place that is convenient for both of you. I will give a disposable camera to your child, who will take photos of what he or she does for one day. He or she will also, take photos of things, celebrations, people, and places that are important to him or her. I will also give a notebook to your child to write why the picture was important to take. After developing the photographs, your child will use them during two or three meetings with me to describe what each picture means to him/her. After I have typed what was tape recorded during the first meeting, I will discuss the information with your child before we start the next meeting with more photos. You do not have to pay for the photographs. Your child can also choose to use a photo that he/she already has at home. After the meetings are complete, your child can keep a copy of all of the photographs that he/she has taken. I can answer any questions that you may have at any time during the study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your son/daughter does not have to take part in this study if you do not wish to allow him/her to do so. If your son/daughter wishes to leave the study—which he/she can do at any time without giving a reason and

without affecting your child's future medical care—he/she can phone me to let me know or inform my supervisor (Dr. Brenda Cameron).

**Benefits:** It has been known in other studies with children affected by war that sharing the experience of war has been helpful to them. The results from this research study may help to improve the services that your son/daughter currently receives. In addition, nurses will understand better, how to care for children affected by war.

**Confidentiality:** Your child's name or your family's name will not be told to anyone. Also, your child's real name will not be written in any report. Only a code (different name) will appear on forms and on the written copy of the meetings or photo conversations. Your child's real name and code name will be kept in a locked place. The only people that will be able to see this information will be my research study committee members, the person who will type the taped interview, and myself. If you agree, I may use the information from this study for a future research study. If so, I will receive appropriate approval from a special committee before I begin the study.

The information and results from the study will be published and presented at conferences. I will not use your child's name or any information that will reveal your identity (who you are). If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact my supervisor Dr. Brenda Cameron or me at the numbers given above.

If you have any concerns about any aspect of this research study, you may contact the Faculty of Nursing Research Office and speak with Dr. Kathy Kovacs Burns at 492-3769.

Parent form consent form Part 2 on the next page.

**APPENDIX D2: PARENT CONSENT FORM PART 2:**

**INFORMATION LETTER AND ASSURANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation  
with Afghan Refugee Children**

Part 2 (to be completed by parents): Please circle “Yes” or “No”

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| Do you understand that your child has been asked to participate in a research study?  | Yes | No |
| Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?  | Yes | No |
| Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?  | Yes | No |
| Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?  | Yes | No |
| Do you understand that you are free to withdraw your child from the study at any time without having to give a reason and without affecting your child’s future medical care? | Yes | No |
| Do you understand who will access to your child’s records?  | Yes | No |
| Do you want the investigator (s) to inform your child’s family doctor or paediatrician that your child is participating in this research study?<br>Doctor’s name _____        | Yes | No |
| Who explained this study to you?<br>_____   |     |    |

Child’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that my child can take part in this study: Yes No

Signature of Parent and/or Head of Family \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_

(Printed Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator or Designee \_\_\_\_\_ Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_

**THE INFORMATION SHEET MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS  
CONSENT FORM, AND A COPY WILL BE GIVEN TO THE PARENTS  
OF THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS.**

بخش D1

شامل فرم والدین  
ضمانت نامه محرمانه و نامه اطلاعاتی

موضوع تحقیق :  
تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان افغانی

محقق:

Zeenath Khan Kanji RN, PHD candidate  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 461-4859

دستیار:

Dr. Brenda Cameron RN, PHD  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 492-6412

علت تحقیقات و بررسی:

تجربه زندگی بچه های افغانی مقیم کانادا بعد از جنگ می باشد که چگونه می توانند  
زندگی روزمره خود را شرح بدهند و این بررسی برای بچه های سنین 13 الی 17  
می باشد.

مراحل تحقیقات:

اگر شما تمایل و موافق جهت این مطالعه و بررسی باشید در 2 یا 3 جلسه توسط خانم زینت با بچه های شما انجام خواهد گرفت. شما هم می توانید در این جلسات حضور به عمل آورید، مکان این جلسات می تواند توسط شما همراه با مترجم فارسی زبان باشد. هر یک از جلسات نیم ساعت خواهد بود. به هر یک از افراد یک دستگاه دوربین عکسبرداری بیکار مصرف داده خواهد شد که جهت عکسبرداری از مردم، مجالس، اماکنی که مهم می باشد عکسبرداری کند و پس از چاپ این عکسها، بچه ها در جلساتی که با خانم زینت خواهند داشت بررسی و مطالعه کنند و یک جلد دفترچه به بچه ها داده خواهد شد جهت شرح کامل از عکسها و چگونگی مهم بودن عکسها از نظر بچه ها. جهت چاپ این عکسها هیچگونه مبلغی دریافت نخواهد شد. بچه های شما می توانند از عکسهایی که در منزل موجود می باشد استفاده کنند در طول جلسه بچه ها می توانند با افراد خانواده خود صحبت کنند و صحبتها ضبط خواهند شد. من صحبتهای ضبط شده را در فرصت مناسب بر روی کاغذ خواهم آورد. در مورد اطلاعاتی که داده شده توسط بچه ها من صحبت خواهم کرد، قبل از جلسه بعدی با عکسهای بیشتر و همچنین بعد از جلسات بچه های شما می توانند کپی از این عکسها را داشته باشند و من حاضر به پاسخگویی به هر یک سوالات شما خواهم بود.

#### محرمات:

اگر دختر یا پسر شما تمایل به انجام تحقیقات نباشند در هر لحظه می توانند از این تحقیقات صرفه نظر کنند بدون هیچگونه عثتی و در آینده بچه ها هیچ صدمه ای نخواهد گذاشت و هر یک از افراد می توانند با من تماس و با دستیارم (دکتر براندا کامرون) تماس برقرار کنند. 492-6412

اسم بچه های شما محفوظ خواهد بود و همچنین در هیچ گزارشی نوشته نخواهد شد. اسم خانوادگی شما به هیچ کس و در هیچگونه گزارشی نخواهد آمد. تمام اطلاعات و مدارک در مکانی امن نگهداری خواهند شد و فقط کسانی به این مدارک دسترسی خواهند داشت که عضوی از دانشجویان من می باشد و البته کسی که مصاحبه را ضبط می کنند.

ریسک و فواید:

هیچگونه سود مستقیم برای بچه های شما نخواهد بود اطلاعات کسب شده در مجلات چاپ خواهد شد و همچنین در کنفرانسها.

این تحقیقات به من اجازه می دهد تا بچه های شما و بچه های دیگر که شکار این جنگ سیاسی شده اند و عامل ترویج آن سیاست و سیاستمداران بوده اند عوض شوند. کسانی که سلامتی و به فکر سلامت بهتر می باشند کاملتر می توانند به این بچه های جنگ زده کمک کنند.

درهین این جلسات بچه های شما امکان دارند که احساس خوشحالی و ناراحتی کنند در هنگام تجربه تقسیمات روزمره شان.

اگر شما متوجه تغییر رفتار بچه خود شده اید و یا 3 ماه بعد از تحقیقات موضوع را با من در میان بگذارید تا من بتوانم شما را راهنمایی کنم برای دیدن روانکاو و البته کاملا مجانی خواهد بود، همچنین بعد از سه ماه جلسه ای با بچه شما خواهم داشت. اگر شما قبول کنید من در آینده از این مطالب استفاده کنم البته از بخش مخصوص برای تحقیقات اجازه خواهم گرفت.

## بخش D2

شامل فرم والدین  
ضمانت نامه مجرمانه و نامه اطلاعاتی  
موضوع تحقیق :  
تجربه حالت های ارتجاعي از طريق مكالمه و عكس از پناهندگان افغاني

قسمت فوق توسط والدین با علامت دایره تکمیل شود...

آیا مطلع اید که بچه شما در این تحقیق شرکت می کند؟ بله خیر

آیا کپی اطلاعات مذکور که در این برگ موجود می باشد دریافت و خوانده اید؟

آیا از ریسک و فوایدی که در این تحقیقات انجام می شود با خبر هستید؟ بله خیر

آیا شما سوال و بررسی در مورد این تحقیقات انجام داده اید؟ بله خیر

آیا می دانید که شما اجازه دارید بچه هایتان را در هر مقطع و زمان از ادامه تحقیقات منع کنید بدون هیچگونه علت و صدمه روحی بچه ها؟ بله خیر

آیا شما می دانید چه کسی دسترسی به مشخصات بچه شما دارد؟ بله خیر

آیا شما می خواهید محققان با دکتر خانوادگی تان در تماس باشند؟ بله خیر

اسم دکتر-----

چه کسی تحقیقات را به شما توضیح داده است-----

اسم بچه-----



من اجازه کامل را به بچه خود می دهم جهت مشارکت در این بررسی و تحقیق

بله      خیر

امضا سرپرست خانواده----- تاریخ و زمان -----

اسم شاهد ----- تاریخ و زمان -----

امضا رسیدگی کننده----- تاریخ و زمان -----

یک کپی از این برگ به والدین داده خواهد شد.

**APPENDIX E: CHILD ASSENT FORM:**

**INFORMATION LETTER AND ASSURANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation  
with Afghan Refugee Children**

**Investigator:** Zeenatkhanu Kanji RN, PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 461-4859

**Supervisor:** Dr. Brenda Cameron, RN, PhD  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 492-6412

**Reason for this Study:** This study is about Afghan children. The purpose of this study is to learn from you about your experiences of living in hard times after surviving the war in Afghanistan. Also, to understand how you managed to live in the difficult times after war. This study is mainly with children who have experienced the hard times because of the war in Afghanistan. This research study is a part of my doctoral study in nursing and the information will help me to understand how Afghan children face problems of living in hard or difficult times.

Some questions that you may be asked are:

How do you deal with the experiences of hard times?

What has been helpful and what has not been helpful to face the hard times?

What problems or struggles do you experience at present?

What can be done so that you have a better future?

**Procedure:** If you agree to take part in this study, I will give you a disposable camera to take photos for a whole day that is any day that you prefer. Whatever you do from the time you get up to the time you go to bed. Also, to take photos of things, celebrations, people, and places that you think are important in your life. I will also give you a notebook to record why you took each picture. You can use the notes when we meet to talk about the photos. I will arrange to have two to three meetings with you to talk about the questions mentioned above with the help of the photos you have taken. After I have typed what was tape recorded during the first meeting, I will discuss the information with you before we start the next meeting with more photos.

The meeting will be in your home or in a place that is convenient to both you and your parents or head of the family. After I have developed the photographs, you will use them during the meetings with me to describe to me, what they mean to you. You do not have to pay for the photographs. You can also choose to use

photos that you already have at home. After our meetings are complete, you can keep a copy of all of the photographs that you have taken. I can answer any questions that you may have at any time during the study.

**Voluntary Participation:** You do not have to take part in this study if you do not wish. If you wish to leave the study, you can do so at any time without giving me a reason. It will not affect your future schooling or medical care. You can phone me to let me know or inform my supervisor (Dr. Brenda Cameron) that you do not wish to continue to take part in this study.

**Benefits:** It has been known in other studies with children affected by war that sharing the experience of hard times because of the war has been helpful to them. The results from this research study may help to improve the services that you receive at present or other children like you in the future. In addition, nurses will learn how to care for children affected by war.

**Confidentiality:** Your name or your family's name will not be revealed to anyone. Also, your real name will not be written in any report. Only a code (different name) will appear on forms and on the written copy of the discussions with the help of photos with you. Your real name and code name will be kept in a locked place. The only people that will be able to see this information will be my research study committee members, the person who will type the interview from the tape recorder, and me. If you agree, I will use the information from this study for a future research study. If so, I will once again receive appropriate approval from a special committee before I begin the next study.

The information and results from this study will be published and presented at conferences. I will not use your name or reveal your identity (who you are). If you have any concerns or questions about this study at any time, please contact my supervisor Dr. Brenda Cameron or me at the numbers given above.

If you have any concerns about any aspect of this research study, you may contact the Faculty of Nursing Research Office and speak with Dr. Kathy Kovacs Burns at 492-3769.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Parent and/or Head of Family Signature	Print Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Witness	Print Name	Date

## بخش E

شامل فرم بچه  
ضمانت نامه محرمانه و نامه اطلاعاتی  
موضوع تحقیق :  
تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان افغانی

## محقق:

Zeenath Khan Kanji RN.PHD candidate  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 461-4859

## دستیار:

Dr. Brenda Cameron RN.PHD  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 492-6412

همانند اینکه شما دانشجو هستید و دانشگاه می روید و من هم یک دانشجو هستم. من تمایل دارم تا بیشتر در مورد مهاجرین افغانی همانند شما کسب اطلاع کنم در مورد زندگی روزمره شما.  
این بررسی کمکی به من و دیگران خواهد بود تا تجربه بچه های پناهنده افغانی را درک کنیم و همچنین کمکی خواهد بود که بیاموزیم چگونه از این بچه ها مراقبت کنیم.  
اگر شما متقبل باشید که قسمتی از این تحقیقات باشید از شما درخواست خواهم کرد که از مردم، جشنها و اماکن که برای شما مهم می باشد عکسبرداری کنید.  
از شما خواهش می کنم که دوربینی که به شما داده می شود در تمامی روز همراهتان باشد.  
به شما کتابچه ای داده خواهد شد تا شاید کمکی باشد برای نوشتن توضیحات در مورد عکسهایی که گرفته اید.  
(چرا این عکسها را گرفته اید) و من در جلسات در مورد عکسها از شما سوال خواهم کرد که چرا این عکسها برای شما مهم بوده است.

در طول جلسه صحبت‌هایمان را ضبط خواهم کرد قبل از اینکه قرار ملاقات برای جلسه دیگری داشته باشیم.  
 شما می‌توانید از عکسهایی که در منزل موجود می‌باشد استفاده کنید تمام عکسهایی که شما عکسبرداری کرده اید به شما پس داده خواهد شد و همچنین در هر زمان می‌توانید با من تماس حاصل بفرمایید.  
 اگر شما تمایل ندارید که قسمتی از این تحقیق باشید در هر لحظه بدون هیچ عثتی می‌توانید صرف نظر کنید.

اسم واقعی شما در هیچگونه گزارشی نوشته نخواهد شد پس هیچکس در مورد مشخصات شما اطلاعاتی نخواهد داشت.

امضا سرپرست خانواده----- تاریخ و زمان -----

اسم شاهد ----- تاریخ و زمان -----

امضا رسیدگی کننده----- تاریخ و زمان -----

**APPENDIX F: VERBAL CONSENT FROM PARENT**

**AND/OR HEAD OF FAMILY**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation with Afghan Refugee Children**

**Investigator:** Zeenatkhanu Kanji RN, PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 461-4859

**Supervisor:** Dr. Brenda Cameron, RN, PhD  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 492-6412

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I have discussed with the interviewer the project titled **Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation with Afghan Refugee Children**.

I have read or listened to the Information Letter. I have been able to ask questions about the project. I agree to participate in this project.

I hereby give my verbal consent to this study.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

I agree that my child can take part in this study:                      Yes    No

Signature of Parent and/or Head of Family \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_

(Printed Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator or Designee \_\_\_\_\_ Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_

**THE INFORMATION SHEET MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS CONSENT FORM, AND A COPY WILL BE GIVEN TO THE PARENTS OF THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS.**

بخش ۳

فرم شامل گفتگو با سرپرست خانواده

موضوع تحقیق :  
تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان افغانی

محقق:

Zeenath Khan Kanji RN.PHD candidate  
Faculty of nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone:461-4859

دستیار:

Dr. Brenda Cameron RN.PHD  
Faculty of nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone:492-6412

اسم من ..... هست. من با مصاحبه کننده صحبت کرده  
ام، عنوان تحقیق تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان  
افغانی.  
اینجانب نامه اطلاعاتی را خوانده و گوش داده ام و من توانسته ام در این مورد سوال  
کنم و راضی هستم که در تحقیق شرکت کنم.  
بدینوسیله من رضایت شفاهی خود را برای تحقیق اعلام می کنم.

نام بچه: .....

من رضایت می دهم که پسر من در این تحقیق شرکت کند.      بله      خیر

امضا والدین/ سرپرست خانواده----- تاریخ و زمان -----

اسم شاهدین ----- تاریخ و زمان -----

امضا رسیدگی کننده----- تاریخ و زمان -----



## APPENDIX G: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

### Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation with Afghan Refugee Children

In order to help me understand my findings I would like you to provide me with some personal information. If there are questions you do not want to answer, it is okay. All information will be handled in a confidential manner and although the information will be included in the final report. It will be done so that you will not be identified.

Code # \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Has there been any gap in your schooling? \_\_\_\_\_

Country and City of Origin \_\_\_\_\_

Which Year Did You Migrate or Enter into Canada: \_\_\_\_\_

Who Came With You to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_

Who Do You Live With at Present? \_\_\_\_\_

How many older brothers and sisters do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How many younger brothers and sisters do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Language spoken at home: \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Occupation (In Canada): \_\_\_\_\_ (In Country of Origin): \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Occupation (In Canada): \_\_\_\_\_ (In Country of Origin): \_\_\_\_\_

Refugee Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Income per month: (Tick the right box)

\$ 3000 – 5000    \$ 2000 – 2999    \$ 1000 – 1999    less than \$ 1000

## بخش G

برگه کامل شده از طریق والدین

موضوع تحقیق:

تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان افغانی

برای تکمیل شدن تحقیقات از شما درخواست می شود اطلاعات زیر را بدقت پاسخ دهید.  
اگر تمایل به جوابگویی سوالات ندارید مانعی نمی باشد، تمامی اطلاعات محرمانه خواهد ماند.  
اطلاعات خواسته شده در گزارش پایانی استفاده خواهد شد و از شما شناسایی نخواهد شد.

کد-----اسم-----تلفن-----

جنسیت: مرد-----زن-----

سن-----میزان تحصیلات-----مدرسه-----

آیا وقفه ای در تحصیل شما بوده است؟-----

شهر و کشور اصلی شما(زادگاه)؟-----

تاریخ ورود به کانادا؟-----

چه کسی با شما به کانادا آمده است؟-----

در حال حاضر با چه کسی زندگی می کنید؟-----

زبان مورد استفاده در منزل؟-----

.....مذهب؟

..... شغل مادر در کانادا..... در کشور خود.....

..... شغل پدر در کانادا..... در کشور خود.....

..... وضعیت پناهندگی.....

درآمد خانواده در ماه: (علامت بزنید)

\$3000-5000

\$2000-2999

\$1000-1999

\$1000 کمتر از

**APPENDIX H: ICEBREAKER QUESTION AND PROBES****Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation  
with Afghan Refugee Children****Icebreaker Question:**

Could you tell me in about your experience of taking photographs?

**Instructions:**

Please choose one photograph at a time.

**Question:**

Could you tell me why you took this photograph?  
Why is this photograph important to you?

**Probing questions:**

Could you tell me more about why you took this photograph?  
Could you tell me more why this photograph is important to you?

## بخش ۴

سوالهای بی پرده

موضوع تحقیق:

تجربه حالت های ارتجاعی از طریق مکالمه و عکس از پناهندگان افغانی

سوال بی پرده:

آیا می توانید در مورد تجربه عکس گرفتن خود توضیح دهید؟

دستور العمل:

در یک لحظه کدامیک از عکسها را انتخاب می کنید؟

سوال:

آیا می توانید بگویید چرا این عکس را گرفته اید؟

چرا این عکس برای شما مهم است؟

سوال کاروشی - تفحصی:

آیا می شود در مورد اینکه چرا این عکس را که گرفته اید بیشتر توضیح دهید؟

آیا می شود بیشتر توضیح دهید چرا این عکس برای شما مهم است؟

**APPENDIX I: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

**FOR TRANSCRIPTIONIST/TRANSLATOR**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation  
with Afghan Refugee Children**

**Investigator:** Zeenatkhanu Kanji RN, PhD Student  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 461-4859

**Supervisor:** Dr. Brenda Cameron RN, PhD  
Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta  
Phone: 492-6412

I promise to protect each individual's privacy and confidentiality. I will not disclose the name or any other pertinent characteristic in any way that may lead to the identification of the study participants.

_____	_____	_____
Transcriptionist/ Translator Signature	Print Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Witness Signature	Print Name	Date

**APPENDIX J: SUPPORT LETTER FROM PROGRAM  
MANAGER, COUNSELLING PROGRAM**



Catholic Charities  
Catholic Social Services  
Sign of Hope

10709 105 Street, Edmonton, AB T5H 2X3  
Phone 780 424 3545 Fax 780 425 6627

December 13, 2006

To: Health Research Ethics Board

From: Karen Reynolds, MSW, RSW  
Program Manager, Counselling Program

Re: Support for Zeenat Kamji's Ph D study entitled *Experiences of Resilience through Photo Conversation with Afghan refugee children*

As program manager of the Counselling program at Catholic Social Services, I am willing to support the above named study. I supervise registered psychologists and clinical social workers. I have been informed by Brenda Cameron about the study and have offered assurances that if any of the study participants require counselling as a result of the research procedures of discussing photos of their day to day life in Canada with Zeenat Kamji, they will be able to access our counselling program by contacting myself or the Intake Line at 420-1970.

If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 424-3545.

Sincerely,

*Karen Reynolds*  
Karen Reynolds, MSW, RSW



servicing people of all faiths and cultures