



Resilience as a communal concept: Understanding adolescent resilience in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Bar Elias, Lebanon



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ABSTRACT

Background: The conflict in Syria has led to the displacement of 1.5 million refugees into the neighboring country of Lebanon, with a majority that have yet to return to their homeland. Syrian adolescents in the town of Bar Elias in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon have lived and grown in the face of resource-limited environments, restricted movement, and a longing for return. Resilience is manifested in the adaptation to such circumstances through close supportive relationships, social engagement, employment, and religion. There is a communal aspect to resilience that is important to the adolescent refugee experience and to the efforts supporting these communities.

Methods: Fifteen one-to-one interviews and two focus groups, with a total of eighteen Syrian adolescents, were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis informed by grounded theory principles. Participants were recruited through partnering non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area, and ethical approval was granted through UCL and the American University in Beirut (AUB).

Results: Syrian adolescents highlighted supportive relationships, communal activities and spaces, memories of home, employment, and shared environments as integral elements to their personal adaptation. Methods of resilience involved social cohesion and establishing stability for one's family and close community. Adaptation to the present is intertwined with facing the consequences of displacement in this new context and maintaining aspirations for a bright future. Engaging with the environments they share and help create is an important facet of resilience and occurs through group gatherings, hobbies, and online communication. Additionally, inner strength can be derived from religious activities and empowers individual processing.

Conclusion: This study illuminates the elements and mechanisms embodied in these adolescents' communities and relationships that allow for adaptation to life in Bar Elias. These factors strengthen their approach to overcome social barriers and practice resilience. These communal aspects of the adolescents' lives also connect to their memories of home, current environment, and future aspirations.

Background

Since 2011, over 5.5 million people have experienced forced migration because of the conflict in Syria (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)). Refugee youths and adolescents face risk of impact to their wellbeing due to experiences before, during, or after migration (Sapmaz et al., 2017). This study examines the personal and social factors that contribute to resilience for adolescent Syrian refugees residing in Bar Elias, Lebanon. Forced migration in this context presents a multiplicity of changes and obstacles to overcome, including economic strain, restricted education opportunities, and exclusionary practices and places (DeJong et al., 2017). Each of the adolescent participants

has grown in the context of displacement, sharing personal and social barriers that complicated their ongoing transition as well as some common supportive elements in their community (Table 1).

The concept of 'resilience' has been criticized for de-emphasizing governance practices which create and maintain conditions of hardship, and over-emphasizing the capacity of the individual to survive these conditions. We agree that the concept of resilience can be 'redeemed' when 'resilience' is approached as a dynamic and unfixed state which encompasses an individuals' social, economic and political context (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016). For these adolescents, resilience encompasses how one adapts to the past and present stressors of forced migration relevant to their experiences, which becomes a deter-

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Table 1

Breakdown of participants age and years since displacement (at the time of the study).

Adolescent	Age	Years since displacement
1	18	6
2	15	7
3	16	8
4	15	5
5	16	5
6	16	1
7	13	5
8	14	5
9	16	8
10	16	5
11	15	6
12	15	5
13	17	7
14	17	6
15	16	6

minant of their mental health (Tol et al., 2013). Resilience consists of a communal element embodied in their relationships and connections to family, peers, and environment that helps derive a sense of security. It also includes effective responses to the social challenges faced by these adolescents. The various discussed pathways of resilience focus on financial or psychological stability, but also importantly in this context, its establishment is both for and by their community and loved ones.

Context of Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon

Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, over 1.5 million Syrian refugees have been displaced across the border to Lebanon, over half of whom are children and adolescents (United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 2017). With the rapid influx of Syrian refugees, urban spaces in Lebanon rapidly responded to the mass arrival, with many of the refugees dispersed across Lebanon in housing or in informal settlements with restricted access to quality health care (Blanchet et al., 2016, Grandi et al., 2018). Despite Lebanon's size, urban areas are demographically and culturally diverse, with the highest concentration of refugees in the Bekaa valley, this study's region of focus (United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 2017). Lebanon has not ratified refugee protection protocols and has suspended refugee registration at UNHCR since 2015, thereby limiting the provision of assistance and restricting opportunities for legal residency and work permits (Grandi et al., 2018; Janmyr and Mourad, 2018).

Forced migration and adolescence

Forced migration has contributed to complex challenges in mental health for refugees. The experience of resettlement is framed by their past trauma, stressful conditions in their foreign home, but also cherished memories of their past home (Ceri et al., 2016). A Turkish study on refugee children and adolescents, of Syrian, Kurdish, and Iraqi descent, identified struggles faced in their former home country, the process of displacement, and their new foreign home as the primary sources of stress (Sapmaz et al., 2017). Refugees are at the lower end of the socio-economic gradient, experiencing various forms of discrimination such as restricted opportunities for employment, housing, and documentation (Hynie, 2017). Family loss and separation can seriously augment the consequences for those that require a caregiver, beyond the existing obstacles faced in employment and livelihood; however, existing research on mental and physical disability in the context of forced migration, especially for adolescents is limited (Shivji, 2010).

Childhood and adolescence are critical periods of growth, and distress experienced early on may present itself as poor physical and mental health outcomes later in life (Van den Berg et al., 2014; Morina et al., 2018). Studies on the effects of forced displacement on adolescents are

lacking, highlighting the importance of understanding protective mechanisms and means of adaptation. Resilience through communal activities, social support, and solidarity can support development and may protect against the exacerbation of mental ill health (Siriwardhana and Stewart, 2013).

Studies about displacement in Lebanon focus mainly on adult refugees. Considering that around 75% of mental health disorders develop during adolescence (Kessler et al., 2005), and that these disorders are influenced and connected to the surrounding environments (Sawyer et al., 2018), this study attempts to shed light on mental health within this community of adolescents that we anticipate to continue to face hostile environments and difficult circumstances. Understanding the pillars of resilience in this formative period will enlighten health-care professionals, social workers, and community members on how to best support and protect against long term consequences of unwellness. Studies support a balanced perspective between recognizing the effect of environmental factors on young people's mental health, and young people's capacity for resilience (DeJong et al., 2017).

Resilience

Resilience is an outcome of one's engagement with an environment, local resources, or a network that can enable one to adapt against adversity. "Resilience is not the goal; it is the means to achieve functional outcomes such as sustained mental health" (Ungar and Theron, 2019). Different combinations of promotive and protective factors and processes (PPFPs), such as education, housing, and employment, are more suited for adjustment to adversity depending on the individual's demographics and circumstances, and these PPFPs are "resilience enabling when they express sensitivity to contextual and cultural dynamics" (Kessler et al., 2005). Social suffering and resource-deprived communities are restricted by the medicalized view of coping such that the "pathological effects of war are found inside a person and that the person recovers as if from an illness" (Summerfield, 2002). Placing resilience outside of the framework of individualized coping expands one's perspective of adaptation in forced migratory contexts as a process of making and maintaining communities and "constantly negotiating and (re)assigning meaning to resources and experiences to make sense of their suffering" (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008).

Resilience as a means to foster and maintain wellbeing implies that its embodiment differs based on one's circumstances, the nature of their conflict, and one's personal sentiment. "Resilience does not exist as a static quality or a mechanistic process but in a continuum that varies over time and context" (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). Adolescents draw upon resources and community to adapt to the stress of their environment and experiences, which differs based on the adolescent's journey, relationships, class, and social engagement (Janmyr and Mourad, 2018). Shared activities that convene others and create common space in daily life, such as hobbies or employment, facilitate adaptation through establishing stability and routine, "reinforcing a sense of shared beliefs and communal belonging" (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). In both these contexts carrying histories of displacement, the narrative interview structure "captures simultaneously the normality and disruptions" of individual and communal life as a tapestry "interwoven with shades of resilience illustrating these juxtaposed realities" (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008).

In 2014, a study consisting of 150 interviews with Syrian refugees and Lebanese adolescents in Lebanon and Syrian refugees and Jordanian adolescents in Jordan found that isolation and stagnation was a common barrier to social development for Syrian girls in Jordan, and adolescent boys felt that their current environment obstructs any chance to advance or personally grow (Mercy Corps, 2014). However, participants presented a collective determination to learn vocational skills and start small businesses and work to help their families and return to Syria (Mercy Corps, 2014). Since resilience is a fluid process that responds to the existing political and social climate, our study aims to capture any

shifts in the adaptive processes among Syrian adolescents in the face of persisting crisis and difficult conditions.

Risk and resilience can coexist, as a study using the Child Youth and Resilience Measure (CYRM) showed that the sample of Syrian refugees did not have significantly lower resilience scores in comparison to the Jordanian youth, despite increased exposure to past trauma and difficult living circumstances (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). Syrian refugee youth highlighted strong family relations, feeling resettled, overcoming the stress of traumatic experiences, and continued learning as sources of resilience to manage displacement (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). Despite crafting a contextually relevant, validated measure of resilience for Arabic-speaking refugee youth, the study lacks a qualitative component to allow the adolescents to describe, in their own terms, how they experience and practice resilience through these supportive structures and activities.

Vulnerability and resilience are not always the opposite sides of the same coin; these adolescents experience the stress of forced migration and the difficult living environment in Bar Elias, yet their emotional and personal struggles do not disqualify resilience (Tol et al., 2013; Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). Preoccupation with the vulnerabilities of adolescents in difficult circumstances “overshadows more culturally relevant and strengths-based conceptualizations of self and wellbeing” (Skovdal and Daniel, 2012). Since adaptation is influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors, then the process of resilience differs between, and even within countries, and is best understood contextually (Ungar, 2008; Tol et al., 2013). In light of their experiences, this study responds to the following research question: how is resilience embodied in relationships and spaces (both personal and shared), within the Syrian adolescents’ communal framework in Bar Elias (Gartland et al., 2019)?

Collective resilience

This study examines resilience in the lens of socio-ecological accounts that acknowledge contextual realities, culture, and social norms as influencers of the resilience process (Ungar and Theron, 2019). We analyzed the role of close relationships, social environments, and communal identity in fostering wellbeing in the face of adversity as well as how adaptive capabilities are built through social engagement, such as employment, hobbies, and even online communication. Qualitative analysis captures how adaptation is emboldened within a system of intersecting supportive elements of the community while also interacting with and affecting the adolescents’ outlook and sense of wellbeing (Southwick et al., 2016).

Methods

General overview

We conducted 15 one-to-one interviews with displaced Syrian adolescents and two focus group sessions with families in their homes, which included 3 Syrian adolescent boys. Adolescent participants were 13 to 18 years old, with a median age of 16 years. These interviews were based around questions related to their family, lived environment/natural setting, routines, community dynamics, memories, and overcoming adversities. Interviews were done in conjunction with the research team, which included local experts of the CatalyticAction NGO. Interview participants were recruited through partnering NGOs and community centers in Bar Elias, namely Multi Aid Programs (MAPS), Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD), and Al Nasr Club, which are involved in education, healthcare, and community programming. The adolescents and their parents completed consent forms and were informed that they could withdraw themselves or their data from the study at any point. The aims of the study and the intended use of the information were made clear to both parties before the interview.

Participants were recruited based on age and residence, regardless of settlement status, in Bar Elias. Eighteen participants were sufficient to find overlaps and reach data saturation. The interview schedule was developed in consultation with the research team, led by the primary author (YN). All interviewers spoke Arabic, and culturally relevant and understandable translations of the predetermined questions were deliberated on and discussed prior to interviews. All interviews were conducted in Arabic and recorded with a digital recording device. The confidentiality of all participants was always maintained. Differently abled participants were included in the research to avoid being ability normative. We do not distinguish between differently-abled participants unless it is relevant to the discussion.

Ethical approval was acquired through UCL and the American University in Beirut (AUB) Research Ethics Committee. Between March 2019 and March 2020, the research team interviewed the adolescents, and of these participants, 15 were male and 3 female. These Syrian participants were selected because of their direct experience of forced migration. Gender representation will be discussed further in the Limitations section.

We conducted an inductive thematic analysis informed by the grounded theory principle using thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The open-coding interpretive approach allowed for common themes to emerge and be identified while reading the transcripts. Semi-structured interview data were coded in two rounds. First, the categories of division were determined inductively and attributed a code. In the second round, they were then divided into categories and sub-categories which allowed for the analysis to clarify the main questions and concepts covered by each overarching theme. Responses that were consistent with multiple categories led to the combination of themes (as Hobbies and Communal Environments). Additionally, these sub-categories helped tie together the themes to synthesize the central topic of resilience. Moreover, the expansion of each category introduced more questions on how each subcategory pertained to life in displacement in Bar Elias and that helped better define resilience as it relates to this context. Analysis of the interviews continued until data saturation and no new themes related to resilience emerged from the interviews. A total of 5 main themes were identified through our analysis, which are described below. Interviews were transcribed into and responses broken down into thematic networks and coded in Microsoft Excel.

No predetermined categories were used to structure the interview questions. However, previously researched literature and the interview guide elucidated on aspects of resilience present in the context of forced migration. These included social and lived environment, family, friends, hobbies, memories, work, social barriers, resilience and adaptation, and sacrifice.

Research context

Of the 18 Syrian adolescents, 15 male and 3 female adolescents were interviewed. The participants all resided in the Bekaa and varied in length of displacement, with a range of just one year to eight years and a median of six years. Many of the adolescents in Bar Elias left Syria during childhood and had to adapt to the difficult context during the critical period of growth and transition (Shlafer et al., 2014). Interviews with adolescents were conducted in Bar Elias, a town within the Bekaa Governorate of Lebanon that has a refugee population of 351,972 as of 2018 (United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 2017). The Bekaa has one of the largest concentrations of refugees living in informal settlements, with the lowest school enrollment rates and nearly half of all households reporting overcrowded conditions (Tol et al., 2013). Across Lebanon, 17% of refugees live in informal settlements and the remaining live in residential buildings and makeshift structures (Grandi et al., 2018). In these settlements, 84.5% of those between the ages of 8-18 years forgo school to begin work, and just fewer than 60% of youth aged 6-14 years are enrolled in schools (Mercy Corps 2018; Habib et al., 2019). This number has further decreased since the pan-

demical and worsening economic situation in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch, 2021). According to the UNHCR, approximately half of the refugees in the Bekaa rely on diminishing WFP (World Food Program) assistance as a source of income (United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), 2017).

Results

Five essential themes were distilled from the participant interviews. These themes include: Supportive Relationships, Work and Employment, Hobbies and Communal Environments, Memory and Home, and Religion. These themes showed significant overlap between the participants when discussing resilience, adaptation, and related topics.

Supportive relationships

The importance of family was consistently brought up during interviews. Families are both support systems and in need of support. Adolescents are in the position to work and contribute to their loved ones, but they also still seek emotional support. When asked who they are closest to or with whom they feel they can speak to in difficult times, every participant either responded with their mother or another sibling in the house. Some of the participants lived in single-parent households, either due to the death of a parent or separation, and the number of siblings varied from two to ten living in a single household. Additionally, some participants lived with their extended family, including aunts, cousins, and stepsiblings.

Interviewer: "So who do you feel supports you the most at home?"

Adolescent 1: "My mother ... she makes everything easier for me"

Families, especially mothers, are highlighted as a source of emotional support and impart the strength to adapt to the difficulties faced. Especially with limited opportunities for housing and employment, families play an integral role in creating a space to adapt and deal with their daily issues. Few complained of the difficulties of living in overcrowded conditions, including those in the single room tents of the informal settlements, or of the sacrifices made to support one's family. One participant with ten siblings captured this sentiment when questioned on what they share with their siblings:

Adolescent 1: "There is no division of what is mine and what is yours".

For many, friends were also emphasized as important sources of support and advice. The emotional experience of forced displacement is intimately connected to a past life and a lived environment that is now shared between refugee adolescents.

Adolescent 2: "Our neighborhoods are close to each other ... there is friendship and food sharing between us."

Adolescent 3: There's cooperation here in this camp. We all help each other.

Although friendship is important, not all participants have been able to form close friendships in Bar Elias. When asked, most Syrian adolescents stated that they only had friends that shared their background. Some participants even shared instances of personal and structural discrimination.

Interviewer: "You feel more comfortable when your friends are Syrian?"

Adolescent 4: "Yes, I am more comfortable."

...

Adolescent 4: "Lebanese neighbors sometimes call us bad words when we're walking on the streets."

Living in displacement and building a new home in Lebanon allowed for some participants to better understand the experiences of others and inspired a sense of communal resilience.

Adolescent 3: There are Lebanese people here from this country that are poorer than us, can you believe it? You might not believe, but sometimes when I get a box I send it to Lebanese people's families, I send it as it is to their homes."

Work and employment

Many of the interviewed participants were forced to forgo an education to find work or assist their family financially. Employment is a means of adaptation for these adolescents as it provides some stability for families in a difficult situation.

Interviewer: "And why did you leave school?"

Adolescent 5: "To relieve the stress on my family."

Interviewer: "And did you like school?"

Adolescent 5: "Yes of course."

Adolescents try to find work in whatever location or discipline possible. In certain cases, participants have been able to keep jobs consistently throughout the period of displacement, while other jobs are seasonal and intermittent.

Adolescent 6: "When I first got here, I was working in an orchard for four months ... Now the season ended. He told me he would let me know once there's work again."

Of all the participants, only male adolescents were informally employed and found intermittent work in Bar Elias. One worked at a grocery store for over six years, another in construction, and another delivering diapers throughout the informal settlements. Employment in these conditions is tiring and demanding; however, sacrifices were made to assist family. When working for Lebanese patrons, participants accepted low pay and complained of bias. Due to the near impossibility of acquiring a work permit, they occupy informal positions at risk of losing their job at any time.

Adolescent 7: "I worked at a barbershop. I worked there until the end and then I left ...

I didn't leave on purpose. They came and cleaned the place up because we looked Syrian."

For those that do not have work, it is seen as a great source of stress. And if work was not available, they explored vocational courses to learn important employment skills.

Interviewer: "How did you get through this difficult experience [displacement]? What do you do to calm down and persevere?"

Adolescent 5: "I learned to get used to circumstances, bit by bit. What can I say? I tried to get used to the environment, and while I worked I tried to get acclimated to it as well."

...

Adolescent 5: "I registered for an electrician vocational course. And I tried to work within it, and I tried to find someone from the program to work with and learn from, but it did not work out."

The female adolescents we interviewed were forced to leave school due to financial stress or to care for their family. While in school, one of the participants was so determined to continue education that she saved on her own to make the remaining funds to pay for her school fees.

Adolescent 1: "This school gave legal support to girls ... but then I couldn't pay the fees; it used to be much less."

Interviewer: "Who used to help you?"

Adolescent 1: "They used to pay a bit and I used to save some pocket money."

Interviewer: "And your parents?"

Adolescent 1: "My parents can't help me."

Due to the social and cultural restrictions on employment, female adolescents are more prominently engaged in family support at home. They help care for elder, younger, and differently-abled family members while others work. This was also the case for some male participants. They all played an important role in the familial support system.

Adolescent 8: "Mama takes care of the baby and I take care of my sister and father."

Mother of Adolescent 3: "... he sleeps next to his grandmother, whenever she wakes up at night he wakes up with her to take care of her."

...

Adolescent 3: "Yes, like every night we go over to see my grandmother, because she can't come to us."

Hobbies and communal environments

Adolescents form relationships with their friends through shared activities, engaging with their lived environment together, and through shared virtual spaces.

Adolescent 2: "Every day we go to each other and spend nights together ... playing every day and defending and protecting each other."

Hobbies provide an avenue to process one's emotions and keeps one from remaining idle. Interviewer: "How do you process your emotions and express what's going on internally?"

Adolescent 7: "We go play football."

The degree of comfort and familiarity with the environment increases with time. They can engage in activities within town and establish communal spaces with their friends.

Interviewer: "What do you do in your free time?"

Adolescent 8: "We go down to the fields, here in Bar Elias. We play football or billiards."

Occasionally, two of the female participants create artwork with their mothers and donate them to foreign NGOs to help fundraise for the community and people in need within Bar Elias, including young refugees requiring medical care.

Adolescent 9: "I am registered with an NGO called "From Syria with Love". Me and mom, we send our drawings to someone in the UK who sells them and sends the profits from these drawings. We use the funds for assistance or resources for Syrians."

Adolescents build connections to their lived environment through building friendships with neighbors. Proximity to home makes such relationships more accessible, especially for differently-abled participants.

Interviewer: "When you go play Counter, who do you play with?"

Adolescent 10: "With our friends or neighbors."

Interviewer: "You meet and then go to a net shop?"

Adolescent 10: "Yes."

Community centers, such as LUPD and Nasr Club, and schools provide spaces for educational and recreational engagement, especially for those adolescents that do not have access to formal education. This reinforces communal ties, provides an enjoyable outlet, and introduces participants to new friends and mentors that can assist with possible employment.

Adolescent 11: "We go and sit there, we have fun, take lessons."

Adolescent's Mother: "They have fun learning ... don't know how to read and write, the computer course teacher told them that he'll give them an Arabic course."

Interviewer: "And in school, you have a lot of friends?"

Adolescent 3: "Yes"

Interviewer: "Lebanese and Syrians?"

Adolescent 3: "Only Syrians because I study afternoon, so only Syrians"

...

Adolescent 3: "Yes, I spend most of my time there. I feel it's [school] really like my home, it's true that I spend a lot of time and do get tired there of course, but sometimes I relax there more than my place here."

Additionally, the mosque is a shared communal space not only for spiritual congregation but also for guidance on the pertinent questions and issues faced by residents of Bar Elias.

Mother of Adolescent 3: "For all the kids, men, a lesson after Maghreb ... all for hygiene ... It's been a month since they started this awareness campaign, prayers ..."

...

Adolescent 3: "It's playing a very positive part, first of all, it's allowing for people to know how to cleanse themselves, how to wash their hands ... so the bacteria doesn't spread on his clothes or something, this is how religion is playing a role."

Adolescents are resourceful and find ways to communicate online despite the difficulties of restricted movement and distance. The shared experience of displacement creates a community that is spread globally, creating a venue for those in Bar Elias to connect with old friends and separated family members.

Interviewer: "Who do you speak with most on Facebook?"

Adolescent 7: "My friends that are far away."

Interviewer: "Where are they?"

Adolescent 7: "Canada and such."

However, not all adolescents are willing or able to congregate with others. Whether because of social norms, safety, or personal preference, adolescents also search for spaces of calm for personal time. To some, this involved using their phone or finding private space. To others, it meant time spent to seriously reflect and process.

Adolescent 1: "Sometimes I write."

Interviewer: "What do you write?"

Adolescent 1: "I write anything that comes to my mind."

Interviewer: "Do you feel better when you write?"

Adolescent 1: "Yes."

Memory and home

To some, displacement occurred 6-7 years prior and others just 1 year; however, hopeful memories remain tangible to these adolescents and provide solace in different ways.

All but one of the participants expressed feelings of longing for their former home country. Many participants missed the lived environment, from their house to the neighborhood, and the people that made it home. Despite previous experiences of trauma and difficult memories, the permanence and living connection of these memories inspired hope for a better future away from the difficulties of life in Bar Elias. Participants expressed sadness in relation to this loss but remained hopeful regardless of how distant Syria may seem.

Interviewer: "What do you think of when Syria comes to mind?"

Adolescent 9: "One gets sad at first, but then we say God willing we will return to it in a better place [than it was before]."

Syria is not only a setting of conflict and a life torn away. It remains a source of inspiration and identity that connects refugee adolescents to their present community and a space that protects and contains the bonds of their family and neighborhood. Many participants shared their fond memories of life back in Syria. These were related to a close community, their surroundings, and a simpler existence that differed from struggles of life in Bar Elias.

Adolescent 4: "Edleb is beautiful, a beautiful area and it's all green, and olive trees, and grass, and her people are good ... I am used to it."

Adolescent 1: "I miss how my friends and I used to play outside ... the childhood I lived in Syria I didn't live it here."

These memories are powerful instruments of resilience for the adolescents in different ways; for instance, they concretize supportive relationships across borders. Nostalgia can provide brief moments of escape for certain adolescents away from their daily troubles. These memories provide a foundation and inspiration for a better future.

Interviewer: "Who do you talk to when feeling annoyed or disturbed?"

Adolescent 12: "With my cousins on the phone ..."

Interviewer: "Do you always see them?"

Adolescent 12: "No, I haven't seen them in about nine years, I only look at their pictures"

Interviewer: "How often do you speak??"

Adolescent 12: "Every day."

Despite the volatility and uncertainty of their situation and of that in Syria, almost every participant expressed aspirations to return. A portrait of their future almost always consisted of returning home, where one can reconnect with familiarity, family, and possible opportunity.

Adolescent 2: "Honestly if the war in Syria ends I will go back to our house, I will buy a home and depend on myself and let my family live well."

Religion

Religion is an important aspect of daily life amongst refugees in Bar Elias. Among the adolescents, it had varying degrees of importance in establishing a sense of inner strength. Religion helps create internal

and interpersonal relationships that can provide coping mechanisms for deeper emotional struggles. It provides a language for resilience in the face of adversity. Religion provides personal psychological space for reflection but retains social roots, assisting the adolescents in creating so-lace in daily life.

Interviewer: "Whom do you talk to when you feel annoyed?"

Adolescent 1: "I don't talk to anyone, I talk to myself and to God, between me and my God."

Religion can be a means of placing the experiences of forced migration and the current situation of life in Bar Elias into perspective. Some of the adolescents have lost their parents and have family members dealing with illness, and religion helps build hope in the face of adversity.

Adolescent 4: "I pray, I read the Qur'an, I pray that my mother becomes better."

Some adolescents derived a sense of self-determination and purpose from religion and faith. As it imbues upon the various facets of daily life, religion can provide discipline, inspiration, and a different perspective for the difficult circumstances faced in their past and present world.

Interviewer: On a personal level, how did religion influence you?

Adolescent 3: First of all, it made me more courageous and it prevented me from being reckless or say something to myself like "I'm something small in this society", the thing is, we're all human beings in the end. Everyone has something that distinguishes him from others. So, it made me more self-confident.

Discussion

Syrian adolescents followed a tumultuous trajectory due to displacement but, considering the prolonged nature of the conflict, they have found ways to settle into these challenging circumstances. Our analysis has identified supportive relationships with family and the community, collective memory, enabling employment opportunities, shared hobbies and activities, and religion as factors that help constitute collective resilience amongst the Syrian adolescent refugee community in Bar Elias. Collective resilience involves practices that encourage coming together and positive expressions of unity in private and public spaces. This is conveyed in personal relationships, be they with family or friends, and embodied in actions to support these connections, such as working to uplift others. Although religion does not always involve coming together, its practice is related to a sense of care and consideration for others', and to the believers, helps preserve and strengthen these connections. These various elements intersect to form foundations that further empower the capability of communal adaptation (Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007).

Family support is integral to adaptation and emotional wellbeing of Syrian refugee adolescents in the forced migratory context of Jordan (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). Similarly, in Bar Elias, the wellness of one's family is deeply tied to the adolescents' wellbeing, and in the same vein, the wellness of the family is tied to the adolescents' contributions as caretakers. For many refugees, family separation is a harsh reality that brings difficulties including emotional trauma, disrupted social networks, and financial insecurity (Mercy Corps, 2018). The adolescents shared similar difficulties when discussing their family networks remaining in Syria. Only one of the adolescents came unaccompanied, but they had extended family within Bar Elias and Lebanon as a whole. Support in the form of sharing burdens, ideas, and "encouraging engagement in other adaptive behaviors" with community assistance improved psychosocial wellbeing (Posselt et al., 2019). Syrian adolescents in Bar Elias expressed deep attachment to their friend groups and family members. They sought emotional support from each other, shared similar spaces, and provide a mutual sense of belonging in an atmosphere that can be isolating in many ways.

Maintaining a connection to one's home, culture and memories can be an important source of resilience (Gibson, 2002; Pineteh, 2017; Yaylaci, 2018). Even though adolescents and their families may have experienced persecution prior to displacement, to some, Syria still represents an escape from the oppression they experience in Bar Elias.

Adolescents carry certain aspects of their social identity and history through memories of former neighborhoods, separated and lost family members, and feelings of the environment, imbuing the contemporary refugee culture with a spectrum of experiences from the rural to urban areas of Syria, ultimately shifting the social landscape of the current community (Jovchelovitch, 2012). For Syrian adolescents in Bar Elias, the current environment provides a stark contrast to the memories of childhood that capture an easier time that they one day hope to return to.

The communal body experiences "a continuum of violence and social inequalities", and within the timeline of displacement and the restrictive environment of Bar Elias, collective memories of this body still provide a sense of belonging in a context that can be unwelcoming, emboldening their future aspirations (Santamaria, 2017). Descriptions of home were not limited to portraits of instability and loss; participants valued the community they were separated from. Relationships are maintained with separated family members and friends, through online communication and phone calls, allowing the adolescents to "draw on others' narratives" to inform a sense of familiarity to the spaces, whether in Syria or elsewhere, that their loved ones occupy (Sender et al., 2021). Increased connectedness through communication technologies maintains the refugees' link to familiarity and a sense of security (Mayo, 2018).

The lack of educational opportunities for the refugee adolescent community in Bar Elias does not predetermine poor mental health outcomes; rather it prioritizes other PFFPs as resilience enablers in that context, such as employment and mobility. As of 2018, 0.5% of the working age refugee population in Lebanon had valid work permits, which increases the chance of difficult work conditions and insecure employment (Yassin, 2018). Despite this, Syrian refugees in Lebanon privilege working to support their family and maintain their dignity (Grandi et al., 2018). Work is done with a goal in mind, including supporting a large family with siblings, medical care or to collect funds to pay off the fees for army conscription. It is seen as an integral element of surviving in a new context and in effect places agency and self-reliance into their hands (Ager and Strang, 2010; Earnest et al., 2015). However, due to social norms and restrictive socioeconomic climate, employment is not readily available for all adolescents, so it was beneficial for some adolescents to become occupied in educational or vocational courses, join a community center, or engage in creative activities to build relationships and morale. These connections embody elements of communal resilience as these networks provide a foundation, purpose and direction towards concrete opportunities for these adolescents and their families. Employment is seen as the only practical means of surviving in the current context and building towards a possible future of return; however, communal engagement instills a sense of independence that improves wellbeing, despite the limitations on mobility due to danger and perceived risk.

Employment provides financial stability for marginalized refugee families, facilitating adaptation to their circumstances while also exposing them to low-wage and poor working conditions. According to a study that surveyed informal settlements in the Bekaa, the average age of beginning work was 10.9 years with the majority working in agriculture (Habib et al., 2019). Although none of the participants in our research worked in agriculture, they shared work experiences that were also physically demanding, and some began working at a similarly young age. Overcoming and enduring these conditions for personal and communal wellbeing is an expression of resilience in this population, especially in the face of the emotional and financial strain that separation from family members in Syria generally causes (Pieloch et al., 2016). Adolescents living with disabilities face even more discrimination and marginalization, as our differently abled participants had shared when discussing the education system, and in certain cases, they are even neglected by health and social services (Reilly, 2010). This places greater reliance on strong familial networks to provide for them, creating another layer in the support networks of communally centered resilience (Reilly, 2010).

Adolescents living in forced migratory contexts have shared traumatic memories and experiences in various studies, including violence or the loss of a loved one, and these experiences are significant obstacles to overcome (Cherewick et al., 2015). In our study, participants dealt with severe injuries and the direct loss of loved ones, and four participants shared detailed experiences of war and violence. Almost all participants dealt with separation from family members. The shared events were all identified as emotionally tolling, and when asked to whom and how they deal with these feelings, many spoke with family or friends or found solace in other spaces. Syrian refugees in Turkey, including parents and their children, shared that faith instills motivation to live a meaningful life, overcome pain, and keep mentally strong (El-Khani et al., 2017). A portion of the adolescents stressed that they preferred solitary periods to overcome internal difficulties and purposefully internalize their distress, in order to not worry their family. Processing trauma requires autonomous action and personal control as well as social participation, and these intertwine within and constitute the process of resilience (Sleijpen et al.). Religion is an important aspect of shared social identity, and as part of communal resilience, it can inspire a sense of purpose and ability to adapt, while also introducing a network of supportive individuals able to provide guidance (Hasan et al., 2018; Cherewick et al., 2015). As an element of communal resilience, religion plays a different role for each individual, and it occupies both a physical space of congregation where one can seek guidance and education on all matters of life as well as a solitary space where one can seek answers internally.

Communal resilience does not only involve adaptation with the new environment, but also adapting to the emotional and psychological situation those circumstances have helped shape. The context of displacement, which includes the external environment, relationships, family separations, and persistent social barriers, is a continuous determinant (pre, during, and post-migration) of the adolescents' personal wellbeing (Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson, 2012; Giordano et al., 2014). Because of this influence, adolescents claimed personal and shared psychological space as well as the imaginary as elements of their adaptation. It is not strictly a counterpart to communal resilience, as these claims to psychological space and the imaginary can have social roots, as in religion or building towards a possible future reuniting with family and familiarity (Levine, 2003). Some adolescents communicated their thoughts about troubles pertaining to themselves and their loved ones on the phone with friends while others found release in activities such as art or football. Memory of home was a global theme that embodied aspects of family, relationships, and community engagement. Memory provides psychological space to engage these connections and experiences and creates space for hope and imagination, which can be actualized by working, supporting family, building relationships, maintaining communication with others, staying determined in the face of adversity, and finding moments to convene and enjoy themselves.

Policy recommendations

Given the current socioeconomic and political instability in both Syria and Lebanon, refugees residing in Bar Elias and throughout the country may be forced to remain displaced from their homes for the foreseeable future. Policy restrictions on refugees' access to employment, education, owning property, and freedom of movement, should be changed as they further marginalize these communities and ultimately hurt Lebanese society at large by limiting refugees' opportunities to contribute and become self-sustaining. Furthermore, they also obstruct the creation of meaningful communal bonds, which, as mentioned above, is an essential aspect of resilience and adaptation.

For many refugee adolescents, displacement marked the sudden stop in their journey of education. Although a comprehensive re-education program may not be fiscally possible in the current economic crisis, facilitating their progression towards employment and engagement is essential for establishing stability in their communities and a sense of

fulfillment in this forgotten generation. Opportunities for education, vocational training, or personal expression should be prioritized for adolescent refugees who have been forced to leave school due to insufficient funds or facilities. Educational opportunities should be supported and emphasized from childhood to adolescence and onwards, and the opportunity to rebuild the foundation that was broken by forced displacement should be offered to all.

Communal resilience exists in the bonds between family members, friends, fellow residents of Bar Elias, and even the environment itself. Mothers and daughters are often the cornerstones and caretakers of the familial units, especially of those that are differently abled and living with long-term health conditions. Younger women must also take on the responsibility of caretaker when the mother must also work to provide for the family. Future policy initiatives and aid distribution should keep in mind that caretakers deserve to be directly supported for their labor, as it is often unpaid and unrecognized.

Strengths and weaknesses

Participants were recruited through two partner NGOs working directly with children and adolescents and a local community center. The criteria for involvement were set by the age range and country of origin; however, recruitment was not based on differences in socioeconomic background, size of family, home status (residential building or informal settlement), or time spent in Bar Elias. We were therefore unable to explore variation due to these factors. Additionally, the study did not equally represent genders. The difficulty to recruit female participants to interview at the NGO's facilities is due to freedom of movement afforded to young women. There was no information available for the demographics of those registered in the NGO programs. However, it was made clear through the female participants that they spend most of their time at home or close-by due to financial restrictions, safety concerns, or social norms. Considering the differences in treatment and the ways through which male and female adolescents interact with their environment and form social networks, further work is necessary to explore gender differences. There are overlapping concerns and similarities in communal mechanisms and expressions of resilience, and these overlaps are discussed and focused on.

The main strengths of the study were that the semi-structured interview format allowed for participants to organically engage with the research team and one another in discussions about general aspects of life in Bar Elias. The conversations were guided by the participants; the interview guide was flexibly used as a tool to instigate conversation or to provide possible follow up questions for topics brought up by participants. This approach minimized the bias of the researcher's perspective. The study attempted to capture a broad diversity of experience of living in Bar Elias to best understand their means of adaptation in this context. Syrian adolescents living with physical disabilities were included as participants because of their unique experiences and the barriers they face towards social inclusion. At no point during the interview was the topic of resilience defined for the participants. Ideas related to or directly overlapping with the concept were discussed when the adolescents' brought up their experiences around displacement or the main themes. This led to resilience to be organically understood from the participants' perspectives.

Conclusion

The forced displacement resides within the adolescents' individual and shared memories to their social ties and relationships. These interviews shed light on the internal dynamism within these adolescents that often view individual wellbeing and wellbeing of their loved ones, or communal wellbeing, as interchangeable. Resilience for these Syrian adolescents involves finding stability such that one is able to accept and adapt to reality and maintain a livable present in the face of an uncertain future. Within the uncertainty glimmers the hope to return to Syria,

but that is dependent upon adapting to the current conditions through different methods, such as employment, hobbies, and forming connections, in order to strengthen one's inner drive and uplift one's support network. Resilience is not just a matter of individual coping. It is also a social issue, it is dynamic, and it is deeply dependent on the ties and social structures within the communities these adolescents live in. Future studies examining resilience should go beyond the individual and see how it is defined in the relevant social context.

Author contributions

Y.N. helped recruit participants, engaged in interviews, transcribed and translated interviews, helped formulate questions, and developed the conceptual framework of this study.

H.S. formed partnerships with organizations in the region, helped recruit participants, organized the logistics of the research project, acquired funding for the project, helped formulate questions, and assisted in the editing process.

M.O. formed partnerships with organizations in the region, helped recruit participants, organized the logistics of the research project, helped formulate questions, and assisted in the editing process.

R.B. helped develop the conceptual framework of the study, provided guidance while writing the article, and assisted in the editing process.

F.F. acquired ethical approval for the research, helped organize the logistics of the project, helped with recruitment, and assisted in the editing process.

D.D. helped develop the conceptual framework of the study, helped acquire funding for the project, provided guidance while writing the article, and assisted in the editing process.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Ethics approval

Ethical approval was acquired through UCL and the American University in Beirut (AUB) Research Ethics Committee

Consent for Publication

Signed consent for sharing information was received from the adolescent interviewees and their parent or legal guardian.

Availability of data and materials

The data generated and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to the private information shared in the interviews but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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