Working Life Stress, Rehabilitation Counselling and Inclusion

Socio-structural influences on the work participation of refugees: an exploratory systematic mixed studies review

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Abstract

This systematic mixed studies review aimed at synthesizing evidence from studies related to the influences on the work participation of people with refugee status (PWRS). The review focused on the role of proximal socio-structural barriers on work participation by PWRS while foregrounding related distal, intermediate, proximal, and meta-systemic influences. For the systematic search of the literature, we focused on databases that addressed work, well-being, and social policy in refugee populations, including, Medline, CINAHL, PsycInfo, Web of Science, Scopus, and Sociological Abstracts. Of the studies reviewed, 16 of 39 met the inclusion criteria and were retained for the final analysis. We performed a narrative synthesis of the evidence on barriers to work participation by PWRS, interlinking clusters of barriers potent to their effects on work participation. Findings from the narrative synthesis suggest that proximal factors, those at point of entry to the labor market, influence work participation more directly than distal or intermediate factors. Distal and intermediate factors achieve their effects on work participation by PWRS primarily through meta-systemic interlinkages, including host–country documentation and refugee administration provisions.

Keywords: Refugee; employment barriers; job networks; language proficiency; work and health; participation

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Citation: Vulnerable Groups & Inclusion. http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/vgi.v3i0.16066
Participation in the world of work enables one to control his or her social outcomes important for a preferred life style. People with refugee status (PWRS) are a relatively untapped and undervalued human resource. Work participation, due to their background, enables PWRS to reconstruct their social identity subsequent to social destabilization and the resultant marginalization in the host country. Social identity of an adult includes self-perception as a working person who substantially contributes to the health and well-being of self, family or significant others, and the community as a whole (Austin & Este, 2001). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2001) described a holistic model of health and well-being as encompassing more than mere physical and mental domains, and extending beyond the traditional absence of disease models. With this holistic framework in mind, the health and well-being from successful work participation has the potential for multiplier effects on many life domains (i.e. family life, use of leisure time, and dietary habits) important to longevity of PWRS.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2011) reported that there were 15.4 million PWRS globally. This number includes those who may have involuntarily departed from their usual domiciled country or community due fear of persecution for any cause. In this review, we use an inclusive definition of PWRS to refer to those who (a) are asylum seekers (individuals awaiting UNHCR refugee status), (b) have been those granted refugee status by the host country; and (c) are unsuccessful refugee applicants still residing in the host country. Not all those with refugee status have work participation as an option and exclusions include those with temporary refugee status occasioned by sudden and acute socio-political upheaval expected to resolve in a short time.

A range of distal, intermediate, and proximal factors influence the work participation prospects of PWRS. Distal influences on work participation include aspects of their background that are likely to impact the odds of securing employment. For example, a distal factor influence on work participation by PWRS is origin-country human and financial capital (OHC), inclusive of the skills, knowledge, and material resources obtained in their country of origin (Bloch, 2002; de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010; Kanas & van Tubergen, 2009). The impact of distal factors on work participation of PWRS depends on how OHC is valued by host-country employers, which is often under- or devalued (see Bloch, 2002; de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010).

Intermediate impact factors on work participation of PWRS include experiences from (a) living in detention centers and (b) the transition from the centers into the community, including living with employment authorization. As an example of an intermediate factor, some countries place work visa restrictions on asylum seekers while their applications are under review. Long waiting periods from visa restrictions diminish employment prospects by the deterioration of skills of PWRS or perceptions of potential employers that long-detention center stay equates to poorer vocational potential of PWRS (de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010; Marston, 2004; Menter & Smyth, 2008).

Proximal factors are those influencing actual access to employment. These are...
mostly related to job seeking and alterable with short-term skills training or vocational support services. These factors include resources and skills for negotiating the labor market and best practices in tapping into host-country human and/or financial capital resources. Other resources for work participation are meta-systemic and span all three levels of impact: distal, intermediate, and proximal. For example, documentation could be a distal resource (e.g. skills and qualifications prior to migration), intermediate resource (e.g. labor market preparation and documentation while in temporary or long-term detention), and proximal resource (e.g. results of evaluation of documentation for employment in host country). These meta-systemic factors exert the maximum influence on work participation potential through the interlinking of distal, intermediate, and proximal factors.

Evaluation of the distal, intermediate, and proximal factors influencing work participation of PWRS leads to an understanding of the social and structural barriers related to the labor market experiences of PWRS that would be important in enhancing their work participation prospects. Therefore, there is a need for systematic studies on proximal socio-structural barriers to the work participation by PWRS as these barriers impact labor market access regardless of antecedent, distal factors, and this study addresses that need.

GOALS OF THE STUDY

We examined and synthesized evidence from studies selected on proximal socio-structural barriers to work participation by PWRS. Based on a thorough review (see Table 1), there appears to be no previous systematic literature review on proximal socio-structural influences on work participation by PWRS. We decided that a mixed studies systematic literature review would be an appropriate methodology for this endeavor, given the diversity of approaches toward studies on this population. Furthermore, a systematic mixed studies review has a heightened yield from combining the strengths of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research evidence (Pluye, Gagnon, Griffiths, & Johnson-Lafleur, 2009). Our specific research question was: How are socio-structural barriers likely interlinked in their impact on the work participation of PWRS?

METHODS

Search terms and strategy

Six major databases were searched: Medline, PsycInfo, Web of Science, CINAHL, Scopus, and Sociological Abstracts. Using a snowballing approach, we retrieved further literature from reference lists and library search databases. We also conducted a hand search of social policy relevant journals. Figure 1 presents the search strategy and the terms utilized. We restricted the literature search to full-text articles in English published from January 2000 to August 2011. Methodological limits were not used in the searches as we aimed for a mixed method approach.

Studies were included for review if they included samples from formal and informal labor markets as well as entrepreneurial activities. The full-texts of articles were screened to ensure that at
least one of these groups was examined. We cast a wide net to include studies from across the globe. Studies that examined skilled migrants, illegal immigrants, or individuals who overstayed their visas were excluded, unless the group also included PWRS. Articles referring to those not of an employable age were also excluded. Employable age was determined according to an internationally recognized minimum age of 14 years and a nominal retirement age of 65 (ILO, 1973). Articles with a predominately clinical focus (e.g. symptomatology and treatment approaches) were also excluded.

Appraisal and data extraction

The selected literature was further scrutinized through the application of a mixed methods appraisal checklist developed by Pluye et al. (2009; see Table I). The checklist allowed for four study methods: qualitative, quantitative observational, quantitative experimental, and mixed methods.

Certain qualitative studies lacked methodological clarity with regard to study design and approach. For example, one qualitative study did not meet the “justification of methods” criterion as the authors claimed to use a grounded theory approach without producing a theory. However, these studies were retained as the aim of review was exploratory in nature. Table II presents the descriptive characteristics of the studies. The limitations of the studies will be discussed throughout the analysis.

Methods of synthesis

Narrative synthesis (Popay et al., 2006) was used for synthesizing evidence across studies that varied in their
Table I. Critical appraisal of primary studies.

| Methodological quality criteria | Cohn et al. (2006) | Hussein et al. (2011) | Lyon et al. (2007) | Menter & Smyth (2008) | Wauters & Lambrecht (2008) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Qualitative objective or question | Yes                | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                   | Yes                       |
| Appropriate qualitative approach or design or method | No                 | No                   | Yes                | Yes                   | Yes                       |
| Description of the context | No                  | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                   | Yes                       |
| Description of participants and justification of sampling | Yes                | Yes                  | No                 | Yes                   | Yes                       |
| Description of qualitative data collection and analysis | Yes                | Yes                  | Yes                | Yes                   | Yes                       |
| Discussion of researchers’ reflexivity | Yes                | Yes                  | No                 | No                    | Yes                       |

Mixed methods $(n = 5)$

| Methodological quality criteria | Bloch (2002) | Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2006) | Hume & Hardwick (2005) | Hugo (2011) | Mamgain & Collins (2006) |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Justification of the mixed methods design | Yes          | Yes                             | Yes                    | Yes         | Yes                      |
| Combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection-analysis techniques or procedures | Yes          | Yes                             | Yes                    | Yes         | Yes                      |
| Integration of qualitative and quantitative data or results | Yes          | Yes                             | Yes                    | Yes         | Yes                      |

Quantitative observational $(n = 6)$

| Methodological quality criteria | Aslund et al. (2010) | Codell, Hill, Woltz & Gore (2011) | de Vroome & van Tubergen (2010) | Edin et al. (2004) | Lamba (2003) | Waxman (2001) |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Appropriate sampling and sample | Yes                  | Yes                                | Yes                           | Yes               | Yes         | No          |
| Justification of measurements (validity and standards) | Yes                  | Yes                                | Yes                           | Yes               | Yes         | No          |
| Control of confounding variables | Yes                  | Yes                                | Yes                           | Yes               | Yes         | Yes         |
methodological approaches. This approach of aggregating and synthesizing the research evidence with mixed method studies reviews includes a four-tier approach toward examining the research evidence: (a) preliminary analysis, (b) exploration of relationships, (c) assessment of the robustness of the synthesis, and (d) theory building. However, due to the exploratory nature of this review, the process of theory building was not completed. Tabling the descriptive characteristics of the studies enabled preliminary synthesis of the findings. Based on the preliminary summary of findings, we applied thematic analysis to construct summaries of the evidence on proximal socio-structural barriers to the work participation of PWRS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We present the results from the literature search with discussion in the context of related studies. First, we present the summary study yield results from the literature search, followed by the thematic analysis discussion. Figure 2 presents the results of the literature search, which yielded 498 citations. After reviewing the article title and abstract, 459 studies were excluded based on the exclusion criteria discussed previously. The remaining 39 studies underwent a full-text review and articles were excluded with regard to exclusion of employment barriers/participation (n = 10), focus on skilled migrants and illegal immigrants (n = 6), and focus on non-primary research (n = 7). For final analysis, 16 studies that met the criteria of the mixed-method appraisal checklist were included (qualitative n = 5, quantitative

| Methodological quality criteria | Beiser & Hou (2001) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Appropriate sequence generation and/or randomization | Yes |
| Allocation concealment and/or blinding | Yes |
| Complete outcome data and/or low withdrawal/drop-out | Yes |
Table II. Descriptive characteristics of included studies.

| Author(s) and year | Country | Methodology | Sample | Method of data gathering | Methods of data analysis | Appraisal scores and missing items | Main findings/barriers |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Aslund et al. (2010) | SWE     | Quasi-experimental | 21,475 refugees and 424,462 Swedish residents | Geographical database (PLACE Uppsala University) | Descriptive statistics, linear probability models, logistic regression | QUAN OBS 3/3 | Refugees placed in poor job access areas (Swedish placement policy) experienced significant unemployment compared to Swedish residents. |
| Beiser & Hou (2001) | CAN     | Longitudinal | 608 refugees | Key informant and probability sampling | Multivariate cluster analysis, covariance, structural equation model, Chi-square | QUAN EXP 3/3 | Early labor market experiences crucial to future employment. English affected employment after 10 years. |
| Bloch (2002) | UK      | Cross-sectional study | 400 Refugees (with permission to work) | Focus groups questionnaires, national labor force survey | Descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and constant comparison | QUAL6/6, Non-randomization of sample QUAN OBS 2/3, 3/3 MIXED | English language proficiency as main barrier to most aspects of job seeking and quality of employment, lack of UK work experience and time in study. |
| Codell et al. (2011) | US      | Cohort study | 85 refugees (employed within 6 months of arrival) | Structured interviews & follow up at 6 months | Descriptive statistics, logistic regression | Lacks justification of measurements QUAN OBS 2/3 | Participants with prolonged refugee flight experiences had lower levels of education, employment status, and language proficiency. |
Table II (Continued)

| Author(s) and year | Country | Methodology | Sample | Method of data gathering | Methods of data analysis | Appraisal scores and missing items | Main findings/barriers |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Cohn, et al. (2006) | UK      | Unspecified | 31 refugee doctors with (psychiatrists) follow-up interviews at 6 months | Semi-structured interviews | Coding and thematic analysis, qualitative analysis framework | Lacks methodological clarity and description of the context QUAL 4/6 | Accessing information, progressing through systems (qualification recognition and status), language, and social networks. |
| Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2006) | AUS | Unspecified | 150 refugees, 40 mainstream employers, bilingual interviewers, key informants and migrant employment officers | Survey/questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and in-depth follow up interview | Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis | Unclear methodology and analysis QUAL 4/6 Lacks justification of measurements QUAN OBS 2/3 Lacks justification of the mixed methods design MIXED 2/3 | Progression to higher-level employment was slow. Over-qualification. Jobs were low-status, low-paid, insecure and physically demanding. |
| de Vroome & van Tubergen (2010) | NED | Cross-sectional study | 3045 employed refugees (first generation) | Survey data, (SPVA, Social Position and use of Provisions by Ethnic Minorities) | Descriptive statistics, binary logistic regression, linear regression | QUAN OBS 3/3 | Prior education, and labor market experience, networks significantly related to employment and occupational status. Long stays in reception centers, negatively related to employment and occupational status. |
| Author(s) and year | Country | Methodology | Sample | Method of data gathering | Methods of data analysis | Appraisal scores and missing items | Main findings/barriers |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|--------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Edin et al. (2004) | SWE     | Cross-sectional study | 12,562 refugees | LINDA database | Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, difference-in-differences approach | QUAN OBS 3/3 | Policy and placement/location after 8 years of arrival associated with earnings losses, increased idleness, and welfare dependency. |
| Hugo (2011)        | AUS     | Pilot Study (mixed methods) | Over 600, 1st and 2nd generation refugees and leaders in refugee-humanitarian communities and stakeholders in settlement process | Settlement and Census databases, questionnaires, focus groups, in-depth interviews with | Qualitative and thematic analysis | Total sample not identified QUAL 5/6, QUAN OBS 2/3 Excellent integration of results MIXED 3/3 | Lack of qualifications and education and knowledge about Australian labor market. Poor language proficiency, lack of networks and work experience. Challenging employment services structure. |
| Hume & Hardwick (2005) | UK     | Case Study | 27 refugees and 16 social caseworkers and administrators | Preliminary and In-depth interviews, participant observation, census, statistical records, and cartographic analyses | Qualitative analysis and constant comparison | QUAL 6/6 Lacks justification of measurement and control of confounding variables, QUANT OBS 1/3, lacks justification of mixed methods design MIXED 2/3 | Social support services increase chances of finding employment, difficulties with qualification recognition, language proficiency. |
| Author(s) and year | Country | Methodology | Sample | Method of data gathering | Methods of data analysis | Appraisal scores and missing items | Main findings/barriers |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Hussein et al. (2011) | UK      | Theoretical framework (not clearly specified) | 20 refugees (involved in or seeking work in social care sector) and 5 leaders of refugee support organization | In-depth and semi-structured interviews | Initial coding and thematic analysis | Unclear methodology QUAL 5/6 | Using and approaching Job Centers, cultural differences in job seeking process, lack of job application skills and UK work experience, language proficiency. |
| Lamba (2003) | CAN      | Cross-sectional study | 525 refugees | Citizenship & Immigration Canada Database and structured interviews | Multiple regression analysis, Qualitative analysis framework (Giddens Structuration Theory) | QUAN OBS 3/3 | Human capital (foreign credentials, work experience and language) acted as barriers to gaining employment and played insignificant role in labor market outcomes. |
| Lyon et al. (2007) | UK       | Case Study | 40 refugee entrepreneurs and 10 business advice and refugee community organizations | Interviews and focus groups | Comparative analysis | Lacks description of participants, justification of sampling and researchers’ reflexivity QUAL 4/6 | Limited finances/resources, struggles to identify marketing strategies, access to information, awaiting refugee status, language and childcare. |
| Mamgain & Collins (2003) | US       | Pilot study (mixed methods is unclear) | 4372 refugees | Databases and interviews | Descriptive statistics, quantitative modelling | Lacks justification of sampling and description of qualitative data collection and analysis QUAL | Best predictor of higher wages was language proficiency. Support networks and social connections yield employment results. |
| Author(s) and year | Country            | Methodology     | Sample                                      | Method of data gathering                                                                 | Methods of data analysis                                      | Appraisal scores and missing items | Main findings/barriers                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Menter & Smyth (2008) | UK (Scotland)      | Case Study      | 22 refugee teachers                        | In-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation               | Coding and thematic analysis                                    | 4/6, QUAN OBS 3/3, QUAN EXP 3/3          | Uncertainty of UNCHR status and right to work, extensive and costly re-qualification process, language difficulties, experiences of prejudice and racism. |
| Wauters & Lambrecht (2008) | BEL               | Case Study      | 15 refugee entrepreneurs and 8 business counselling advisors | Semi-structured questionnaire                                                            | Qualitative analysis framework and thematic analysis           | Lacks discussion of researchers’ reflexivity QUAL 5/6                                | Difficulties with qualification recognition, limited finances/resources, issues with the “system”, discrimination and language. |
| Waxman (2001)     | AUS                | Cross-sectional | 162 refugees (principal applicants)        | Questionnaires                                                                         | Parametric and nonparametric tests, Pearson’s bivariate correlation analysis, ANOVA | Non-randomization of sample and under sampling QUAN OBS 2/3 | Language as major barrier to employment, employment status not impacted by time in refugee camp, imprisonment related to active job seeking. Qualifications and work experience no effect on employment. |

QUAL = qualitative, QUAN OBS = quantitative observational, QUAN EXP = quantitative experimental, MIXED = mixed methods.
observational $n=5$, quantitative experimental $n=1$, and mixed-methods $n=5$).

**Thematic analysis**

An evaluation of proximal factors on work participation yielded three socio-structural barriers: (a) host-country human capital and policy, (b) host-language proficiency, and (c) employment support networks and services. Intermediate factors on work participation included processing systems for PWRS and employment services. These
proximal and intermediate factors would be interlinked by the meta-systemic factors, such as host-country documentation and refugee administration systems (Figure 3).

**Host-country human and financial capital**

Host-country human capital includes skills and knowledge gained within the host country. It surfaced as a *proximal* socio-structural barrier in nine of the studies (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Bloch, 2002; Cohn et al., 2006; de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010; Hugo, 2011; Hume & Hardwick, 2005; Hussein, Manthorpe, & Stevens, 2008; Lamba, 2003; Waxman, 2001). This factor would include skills and knowledge in labor market access. For instance, in the Bloch (2002) study conducted in Britain, up to 20 of the 400 participants identified lack of experience with host-country job-seeking skills as a major barrier to work participation. PWRS in London reported being unaccustomed to the formalized job application processes (Hussein et al., 2008). In addition, lack of informal job networks in the host

![Figure 3. Socio-cultural factors on work participation.](image-url)
country is a barrier to work participation (Lamba, 2003). Education, in the host country, was also related to employment and increased occupational status (de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010) as education is a human capital resource adding to perceived employability and access to social networks. For example, as a result of their social participation via assimilating the local culture (e.g. making friends among the local Dutch population), PWRS in the De Vroome and van Tubergen (2010) study were significantly more likely to find employment and have more meaningful occupations than those who did not. In support of the social participation phenomenon, Lamba (2003) reported that 25% of PWRS received assistance in job seeking from friends and family, while only 3% relied on external networks and services.

Lack of financial capital was a barrier to becoming self-employed for PWRS. This barrier was associated with difficulties in the financial and regulatory institutions of the host country (Hugo, 2011). However, some PWRS procured their own capital (in either formal or informal labor markets) to market themselves as bonfire workers or business partners. They also used personal savings or secured financial capital from family and community networks (Lyon, Sepulveda, & Syrett, 2007; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008).

Language proficiency

Language proficiency was considered a major proximal barrier to employment in two of the studies (i.e. Bloch, 2002; Ives, 2007; Kokanovic et al., 2010; Marston, 2004; Waxman, 2001). For example, Waxman concluded that the likelihood of finding employment increased with language proficiency. However, Bloch (2002) identified that language proficiency was unrelated to accessing low-skilled jobs, which did not require strong language skills (Bloch, 2002). Beiser and Hou (2001) concluded that English language proficiency had little effect on employment, at least during the initial stage of resettlement. Based on these studies, distal factors, such as the recognition of qualifications, and intermediate factors, such as market trends may have a greater impact on employment than language proficiency.

Nonetheless, some studies report language proficiency in the host-country language alone may not help access to employment without employment networks. As an example, Waxman (2001) found that language training did not significantly impact job-seeking activities, as this usually occurred through informal networks outside normal working hours. These informal networks may include PWRS, who have already secured jobs, assisting new arrivals or those out of employment to access employment. To facilitate securing jobs for PWRS, employer or business networks are necessary. Employer or business networks may be more concerned about whether PWRS can perform the essential functions of the job, perhaps more so than their local language proficiency. This concern would likely be the case for job positions that are not primarily based on language or verbal communication (e.g. unskilled or semi-skilled blue collar jobs). Nonetheless, host-country language proficiency would add to the ability to access meaningful employment through added capacity to negotiate entry to a broader
range of work positions within or across industries. It would also add to one’s job networks, including those of socially networked host-country workers.

**Employment support services**

Cultural insensitivity within refugee processing centers and employment-seeking support services comprise intermediate factors on the work participation of PWRS. As noted previously, barriers such as torturous visa processing systems that keep PWRS marooned in holding camps exist. However, once they transition from holding camps to locations with more employment possibilities, they may find employment services inaccessible due to lack of cultural competencies among service providers. As a result, they may perceive the job-seeking procedures to be daunting in their requirements (Corey, 2009; Hagelund & Kavli, 2009). In the context of professional accreditation bodies, there was a perceived lack of centralized source of information (Cohn et al., 2006). In the UK, PWRS reported being unaware of available business support services (Lyon et al., 2007). Those who did use business and job-seeking services found them too bureaucratic (Lyon et al., 2007; Hussein et al., 2011). For instance, the information on labor market opportunities provided by some employment services was of limited value to PWRS when they did not receive assistance in understanding the advice (Hussein et al., 2011). There is a degree of unavoidable administration in frontline and support services in developed countries that refugees may not have experienced in their country of origin. Understandably, it may take time for them to get accustomed to new systems to access employment.

Research shows PWRS who hold membership of mainstream organizations enjoyed higher occupation status (de Vroome & van Tubergen, 2010). This status may be due to businesses brokering for work participation for PWRS. For instance, Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) found that business support organizations had a positive effect on entrepreneurs of refugee status. Anecdotal evidence from social and economic service providers in Portland, Oregon, suggest that participation in such services was considered invaluable to the overwhelming majority of new arrivals (Hume & Hardwick, 2005).

**Meta-systemic factors**

Meta-systemic factors included documentation and refugee administration systems. These meta-systemic factors arise out of the requirements, policies, and procedures of the host-country institutions.

**Documentation.** Documentation requirements of host countries, inclusive of the qualifications for employment, were a major meta-systemic barrier to work participation (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Menter & Smyth, 2008). For instance, Menter and Smyth (2008) reported that in Scotland, teachers of PWRS experienced difficulties related to the assessment of international certificates and the rigidity of the re-qualification process. However, Bloch (2002) found that only 15% of PWRS with qualifications attempted to have them recognized, and 71% of PWRS who attempted to have qualifications recognized were
successful. Of those who did not attempt to convert their qualifications, a significant portion cited their lack of documentation as a reason. Even where documentation was available, procedural issues impeded the recognition of professional or educational equivalency (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008).

Documentation of transferability of skills was closely related to perceptions of PWRS by host-country employers of being unqualified for existing jobs. For example, research into Indian, African, and Chinese immigrants to New Zealand found that many participants expressed job-dissatisfaction due to a perception of being overqualified for the jobs in which they were employed (Pernice, Trlin, Henderson, & North, 2000). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) found that 55% of PWRS with university and post-graduate qualifications experienced difficulties attaining high-skilled employment and were employed in cleaning and factory jobs. Similarly, Lamba (2003) reported that 60% of the 525 participants in their study were overqualified for their current job. Thus, meaningful employment, or that which allows for a subjective sense of self-validation (Mamgain & Collins, 2003), was unlikely for PWRS carrying foreign work-related documentation.

Documentation related to educational or professional qualifications of PWRS may be left behind in the urgency of the flight process or lost in transit. Efforts to gather documentation were often abandoned due to difficulties in communication with the country of origin (Lyon et al., 2007; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). In other cases, there may be no formal certification for certain occupations in the country of origin (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008).

In addition, a lack of documentation was shown to be a significant barrier in dealings with financial and regulatory institutions. This barrier would be more salient for formal labor markets where there is greater involvement with financial and regulatory institutions than those operating within informal labor markets (see Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). These findings highlight the interaction between the influence of distal, intermediate, and proximal factors on work participation through their metasystemic interlinking.

Refugee administration systems. Refugee administration systems with consequences for work participation by PWRS include allocation policies to direct the inflow of PWRS to particular locations (Aslund, Osth, & Zenou, 2010; Edin, Fredriksson, & Aslund, 2004; Waxman, 2001) and visa restrictions (Menter & Smyth, 2008; Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). For example, the impact of a Swedish placement policy was the subject of two separate studies conducted over an 8-year period. Aslund et al. (2010) identified a direct correlation between localized access to jobs and individual vocational outcomes. Similarly, Edin et al. (2004) found that PWRS, who were assigned to areas with poor employment access received 25%–29% less earnings, were more likely to be unemployed. They also were about 50% more likely to receive welfare assistance than those who had not been subject to the allocation to low-employment prospect areas. For example, asylum seekers in Belgium require a “professional card” to establish a
business (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008). This process involved meeting difficult criteria (including knowledge of business administration and proof of qualification) and long waiting times. Consequently, many asylum seekers were prevented or delayed from establishing their businesses.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR WORK PARTICIPATION REHABILITATION WITH REFUGEE STATUS**

Building partnerships with PWRS can be fostered by tailored intervention programs that seek to positively influence proximal factors to job entry. Due to differences in employment contexts, some origin country skills and experiences may not transfer to host country and this would change the nature and meaning of available employment. Thus, PWRS may need to reconstruct and adapt to the “meaningfulness of work” in their new context. Programs and services provided by the host country can assist in re-framing the “meaningfulness of work” by helping PWRS to find suitable, fulfilling employment. Many of the services used to address barriers to work participation for other persons of disadvantaged backgrounds within the host country (i.e. lower socio-economic status, minority status, and disability status) may be adapted for PWRS. An initial investment via the training of PWRS by the host country has the potential to significantly impact the local economy. These programs and services should employ an individualistic approach to ensure best, most suitable outcomes in work participation.

A thorough assessment of the educational and vocational background of PWRS is needed to determine the skills that can be transferred to occupations and available opportunities within the host country. If there is a skills deficit on part of the person with refugee status or labor market deficit in the host country, short-term vocational training and job placement services should be used based on the initial baseline assessment of interests and skills in combination with the local labor market availability and projections. Specifically, for PWRS, focusing on self-advocacy skills with prospective employers and business partners could assist them in re-framing their origin country social capital to suit local employment contexts. Vocational counselors and other related social service providers can assist PWRS in these endeavors. These individualized interventions have the potential to significantly impact work participation of PWRS as it ensures economic independence, which leads to social participation and probably overall better quality of life outcomes for PWRS in the host country.

**Specific implications in the Australian context**

There are specific implications for work participation of PWRS in Australia. These implications that may or may not translate to other host countries are listed here for illustrative purposes. Colic-Peiser and Tilbury (2006) consider labor market constraints as a challenge for new PWRS in Australia who have little choice but to accept low-status jobs as a way out of marginalization.
created by unemployment and welfare dependency. They further suggest, as these communities grow and increase their Australian cultural competency and accumulate social as well as economic capital, they too may develop their ethnic entrepreneurship. Additionally, the countries may develop occupational or professional niches in the mainstream labor market, as other groups did before them. As a result of the aforementioned factors, the economic status of these communities may improve. However, this process takes time and occurs in parallel with a number of ongoing challenges.

The material, emotional, and psychological needs of PWRS, in the early phases of resettlement, are further challenged by previous experiences of loss, grief, and trauma, and, as Allen and Hess (2010) reported, the losses continue after re-settlement and include loss of: (a) culture, heritage, and roots, (b) social networks and social supports, (c) previously valued social roles and activities, and (d) sense of control or environmental mastery to negotiate life in a new setting. Furthermore, there are added stressors associated with language barriers, isolation, and poverty. In the absence of an extensive evidential base, what practical implications lie herein for rehabilitation counsellors and other human service professionals?

There seems little doubt that material, emotional, and psychological needs of re-settled PWRS must be addressed in a culturally respectful and responsive manner. Addressing these needs requires a commitment from rehabilitation counsellors and human service professionals to develop relationships and trust, and to begin services at the point where the client connects culturally. As Allen and Hess (2010) further note, “intentional and generous engagement with the material needs of refugees honours their worldview, and has the potential to become a culturally sanctioned pathway into deeper level psychological work” (p. 79).

In addition to a prime responsibility to commence service at a culturally comfortable level, the rehabilitation counsellor may draw on the experience of programs such as that undertaken by the Calvary Hospital in Canberra. This mentoring program for PWRS seeks to provide an affirmative and individualized learning placement in workplaces with the dual goals of developing participants’ self-confidence and encouraging host networks to support their engagement in the workforce. The program and its outcomes are described by Bradford and King (2011). The program leveraged cultural and social gains off rotating work placements within the hospital and exposed each participant to a number of mentors throughout their placement experience. The gain of practical and vocational skills occurred over a period where vocational counselling identified additional needs in self-confidence, skills translation, and Australian acculturation. Specific transferable employability skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and planning and organizing, were assessed and provided as needed. The developmental experience melded emotional, psychological, and vocational needs and was intended to develop the participants’ self-efficacy based on the tenets of social cognitive theory that self-efficacy is one of the building blocks of successful career development. The Calvary team claim
the program has been a success for the 26 participants who have completed it; and the program provided them with a foundation for goal setting and skills for transition to other careers or future studies. The additional powerful and cultural change outcome occurred amongst the participants’ mentors who felt that they had both contributed meaningfully to a new settler’s life and gained an increased humanitarian cultural awareness.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study had several limitations. First, seven of the studies lacked clarity with regard to methods of data analysis. Consequently, interpretations could be imputed, not justified by the data. Second, there was limited demographic and employment information within study samples, which impaired comparison between studies and constrained the inferences that could justifiably be made on the evidence. Finally, 10 of the 16 studies were conducted within Europe where local policies and contexts may have influenced the overall findings of the review. In addition, the scope of the databases and local resources used may be a bit limited. Future researchers may want to widen the net to include other databases and avenues for securing studies, specifically reports from governmental agencies and unpublished theses and dissertations.

Because of the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative studies, this systematic review did not allow for application of the meta-analytic model of aggregate data analysis. However, it should be noted that narrative and meta-analytic syntheses “share many fundamental processes” (Quintana & Minami, 2006, p. 842). Furthermore, the narrative review provides the catalyst for conducting future meta-analysis with appropriate inclusion criteria for such an analysis. Future researchers may want to examine the appropriateness of adopting meta-analytic procedures to aggregate an effect size and strength of relationship, for the quantitative observational and experimental studies included in this exploratory analysis.

Finally, it is perhaps not surprising that research in the area of work participation for PWRS is less extensive than that of other social groups. The prevalence of conflict and civil strife requires an immediate response for food, shelter, and a safe environment. Only when these immediate survival needs are met can attention be given to the provision of children's education, delivery of sustainable health care, and meaningful and appropriate workforce participation. In recent years, the number of PWRS exceeds the capacity of countries willing and able to assimilate them and this has only exacerbated the provision of basic needs and further delayed successful workforce integration.

Further research is clearly indicated, and given the very complex social and cultural issues at play, this research would be most beneficial using longitudinal methodologies, which are currently very few. Such research could usefully incorporate children’s educational development, social integration and career planning, adult workforce integration and workforce mobility, and host–country current and evolving...
societal and cultural supports. The outcomes and learning from such research would enable host countries to better develop their policies and deliver their services, and allow host citizens to better welcome, understand, and assist new arrivals to full societal participation.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This systematic review focused primarily on the socio-structural barriers encountered by PWRS in attempting to find employment within the host country. The evidence suggests that many PWRS were considerably affected by barriers such as the level of language proficiency, the recognition of OHC, and metasystemic issues. These were found to be interconnected across the studies as some barriers would have a knock-on effect for other problems. Despite the varying international contexts across the studies, a majority shared similar findings. This similarity may suggest that the experiences of PWRS remain relatively homogenous. It may therefore be appropriate to collaborate internationally on approaches to addressing refugees’ employment barriers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

There was no external funding for this research project.

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