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Summary Statement of Studies and/or Research:

My current field of study is Occupational Therapy, which is a health profession that works with clients to enable engagement in and performance of activities that foster health and well-being. Occupational therapists apply a critical lens to the struggles that individuals in society experience and create or promote strategies to enable clients to overcome these obstacles to live a meaningful, fulfilled, and healthy life. My current research proposes to engage with refugees in Toronto, Ontario, Canada to identify the most urgent and pressing needs of this population. By identifying these needs, I aim to improve the quality of care that refugees receive upon resettlement, which will improve their mental and physical health and well-being.

The world is currently experiencing the highest rates of forced displacement on record with 65.3 million forcibly displaced people and 21.3 million refugees worldwide. Canada typically accepts 24,514 refugees each year; however, due to the surging refugee crisis in Syria, Canada has increased its commitment and has accepted 39,671 Syrian refugees. These figures indicate the introduction of a diverse population into Canada; a population that is often characterized by reduced choice, limited opportunity, and experience with war and trauma.

Refugees resettled in Canada have likely experienced disruption of their daily activities and sense of self due to war, conditions in refugee camps, and the new challenges associated with adjusting to life in Canada. Refugees are required to leave their homes with few resources and no idea if, or when, they will be able to return. Upon arrival in Canada, refugees experience challenges related to difficulties learning a new language and systemic barriers, such as poverty, inadequate social supports, and discrimination that exacerbates injustices. Further, Occupational Therapists (OTs) who interact with refugees express feeling unprepared and overwhelmed. These feelings are motivated by the complex and unique healthcare needs of the refugee population, including culturally competent care, language and interpretation services, economic and social barriers, isolation, and exposure to trauma and war.

The objective of this research is to learn more about the occupational needs of the refugee population in Toronto. This research will engage directly with refugees' perspectives to ensure that the most important needs of this population are met. This research will identify areas for growth in occupational therapy practice that can improve our abilities to work with refugees and lay the groundwork for the creation of best practice guidelines.

For this research I will conduct a needs assessment survey to ask refugees in Toronto what they see as the most important needs of their population. The survey will be distributed to a sample of the refugee population in Toronto. Refugee participants will be contacted through refugee support organizations in Toronto such as the FCJ Refugee Centre. The needs assessment will enable the researcher to engage with refugees and consider their perspectives on their challenges. The survey will be made available in participants' preferred language.
The Canadian government’s 2017 immigration plan aims to accept 43,500 refugees, which is almost double previous targets. This indicates a growing need for the adaptation of health services to meet the needs of this population. In recent years, OTs have emphasized the importance of conducting research that addresses the systemic obstacles faced by refugees that restrict their ability to integrate with their communities. While there is growing support for OTs to work with refugees, there is little guidance to build the capacity of OTs in this area. Therefore, this research will engage with the perspectives of refugees in Toronto to gain insight on how best to improve the quality of care that OTs provide for refugees and how OTs can best advocate for the needs of refugees. By identifying the most pressing needs of refugees this research will guide the development of evidence based guidelines to assist OTs with enabling refugees to engage with their occupations and communities in their new Canadian context.

References