The Role of Family and Faith as Resources within South Asian Muslim Newcomer Communities Settling in Canada

by

Linah Fatimah Hashimi

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master’s of Arts in Counselling Psychology for Psychology Specialists
Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study examines the psychological and emotional experience of settling in Canada for South Asian Muslim newcomers and the coping systems they use to manage the challenges associated with moving to a new country. Ten South Asian Muslims were interviewed within the Greater Toronto Area. They were posed questions related to the hardships they encountered as they settled in Canada and how they managed those challenges. The data was analyzed using Grounded Theory. A model was developed to illustrate resources used by newcomers to help maintain their mental health and well-being. Upon settling in Canada, the participants experienced psychological stressors and therefore sought help from their Islamic faith, their families, and community services. The combined resources facilitated the immigrants’ resilience and allowed them to maintain a positive outlook towards their immigration experience.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Canada is considered a multicultural country with people from a multitude of cultures and backgrounds. According to the 2001 Canadian census, approximately 18% of Canadians were born outside Canada, with large proportions of these immigrant Canadians living in metropolitan cities such as Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2002). Toronto, in particular, is known as one of the most diverse cities in the world because of its vastly multicultural population residing within its boundaries (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005).

1.1 Background

Due to the influx of immigration to Canada in the past two to three decades, the mental health status of immigrants in Canada has become a peaked topic of interest. According to a recent study by Tiwari and Wang (2008), immigrants upon arrival are on the whole mentally and physically healthier than native-born Canadians (Tiwari & Wang, 2008). This contrast is likely due to the stringent health requirements immigrants need to meet to be eligible for immigration (Kirmayer, Weinfield, Burgos, Galbaud du Fort, Lasry & Young, 2007). However after they arrive, the health of immigrants may deteriorate as they face the struggles of settling into a new country (Kirmayer et al., 2007). For example, recently-arrived immigrants, or newcomers, have trouble obtaining employment that match their skills; navigating the infrastructure in order to obtain their immigration papers, health card and housing; learning the dominant language; coping with discrimination and establishing adequate social support systems (Simich et al., 2005).

Despite the presence of daily struggles, many newcomers prove to be quite resilient (Simich et al., 2005; Kuo & Tsai, 1986). Generally, mental health issues are less reported in newcomer

1 For the purpose of this study, I differentiate between the terms “newcomers” and “immigrants.” Immigrants are generally defined as individuals who come to a country for the purpose of settling in that country (Merriam-Webster’s, 2003). However, there is no parameter for time such that an individual who was born in India but has been living in Canada for twenty years can still be considered an immigrant. However, a newcomer is defined as an individual who is new to an activity or location (Merriam-Webster’s, 2003). Because they are new, they will face different challenges in their lives than an established immigrant of twenty years and so a distinction needs to be made between established immigrants and recently-arrived immigrants. The term “newcomer” contains both the idea of immigration as well as time thus making it suitable to describe recently-arrived immigrants.
populations (Tiwari & Wang, 2008), as is the use of mental health services (Tiwari & Wang, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2007; Ma & Chi, 2005; Whitley, Kirmayer & Groleau, 2006). The under usage of mental health services could be due to a multiplicity of factors.

First, it could be that newcomers do not require the services to the same degree as native-born Canadians because they are mentally healthy (Tiwari & Wang, 2008). However, according to newcomer narratives found in some qualitative studies, the participants describe difficult, stressful and distressing lifestyles when they first arrive in Canada, making it difficult to imagine that they are not struggling emotionally (Ralston, 1996; Khan, 2005; Kim, 2006).

Second, newcomers could be facing various barriers in accessing these services (Simich et al., 2005). For example, newcomers may be unaware of what services are available to them or how to access them (Simich et al., 2005). Alternatively, if they do access the services, they may experience culturally-inappropriate treatment which could deter them from seeking help from mainstream health services again (Sue & Sue, 1977).

Third, depending on one’s culture, one can hold many different conceptions regarding mental health and illness (Kirmayer et al., 2007; Sheikh & Furnham, 2000). Incidences or situations that the dominant culture assigns as stressors and mental illness can be alternatively interpreted as a part of life that must be tolerated by people of a different culture (As-Suyuti, 1999; Laungani, 2002). Furthermore, many cultures attribute supernatural or religious causes to their mental distress and therefore have constructed a completely different treatment system in order to treat psychological suffering (Hatfield, Mohamad, Rahim & Tanweer, 1996). Consequently, depending on a person’s assessment and interpretation of life situations, they will seek help accordingly (Kirmayer et al., 2007; Sheikh & Furnham, 2000). For example, research has demonstrated that many immigrants will use traditional or indigenous coping methods that are more relevant to their worldview such as social support systems, religion and traditional healing methods to help them cope with their struggles (George & Chaze, 2009; Sheikh & Furnham, 2000; Ally & Laher, 2008).

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the role of spirituality, religion and religious institutions in maintaining the mental health of immigrant populations in North America (Kobeisy, 2006). Regular prayer has been shown to decrease the risk of physical and psychological diseases and disorders (Abu-Ras, Gheith & Cournos, 2008; George & Chaze,
For newcomers, as they face the many challenges of settling in a new country, praying can be a very helpful coping method as they may feel comforted and less isolated recounting their worries to a higher, kinder and omnipresent being (Hatfield et al., 1996). Furthermore, religious institutions such as prayer groups, churches, mosques and various religious clubs can facilitate building social support systems within the immigrant community, as well as providing crucial information and help to newcomers who may be at a loss on how to proceed once they arrive in Canada (Hirscham, 2004).

Recently, in addition to studying the role of Judeo-Christian religions in the lives of immigrants, there has been an increasing interest in the role of Islam in Muslim immigrants. Islam has over a billion followers from all over the world, resulting in followers from numerous different countries and cultures (Esposito, 1998, as cited in Ali, Liu & Humedian, 2004). Within Canada, Islam is the most prominent non-Christian religion, with the largest proportion of Muslim immigrants coming from West Central Asia, the Middle East and South Asia (Statistics Canada, 2002).

1.2 Implications for this study

Typically, the research on Muslim immigrants has found study participants reluctant and wary of using government and mental health services in times of need because these services do not comply with their worldviews (Kobeisy, 2004; Carter & Rashidi, 2004). Alternatively, Muslim immigrants will use traditional or indigenous coping methods such as community and family social support systems, traditional healers and religion (Kobeisy, 2004; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999). Although these resources play a key role in maintaining the mental health of Muslim newcomers, there have been relatively few studies in Canada that have examined these resources in detail within the Muslim population. Furthermore, while there have been numerous studies examining the role of religion as a coping system in the lives of immigrants, less attention has been given to this role in the lives of recently-arrived immigrants, or newcomers, specifically. Given that challenges faced by immigrants are most acutely felt within their first few years of arrival in Canada, it is important to examine the resources that newcomers access when they could be at the greatest risk for psychological distress.
1.3 Objectives of this study

As the Muslim population in Canada is growing, it is important for the mental health field to have a thorough understanding of what resources are currently used by Muslim newcomers and how relevant the newcomers perceive these resources to the meeting of their needs. This study looked to fill this gap in the literature by examining the resources used by recently-arrived South Asian Muslim immigrants in Canada, with special attention given to the role of religion in the lives of the newcomers. Not only was this study qualitative, thus providing an in-depth analysis of the help-seeking behaviours of Muslim newcomers, but it also interviewed a sub-population that has been neglected by the mental health field: South Asian Muslims. Furthermore, there has been a trend to conduct qualitative studies predominantly on the immigration experiences of South Asian women because they are an oppressed group and often are not given a voice (Ralston, 1996; Khan, 2005; Hilton et al., 2001; Barn & Sidhu, 2004). While this area of research is crucial, its gendered focus paints an incomplete picture of the immigration experience as the voices of men are virtually absent from this area of study. It is because of this dearth in the current research that both genders were recruited for this study, although, interestingly, in the end more women were willing to participate in the study.

Social service workers and mental health professionals in and beyond Toronto could find this study to be a useful description of how South Asian Muslim newcomers experience and perceive settlement challenges, in addition how they use the resources available to them in order cope with these challenges. Gaining a deeper understanding of the help-seeking behaviours of this population could help counsellors provide culturally-competent service as they would be able to appreciate and utilize indigenous resources within the South Asian Muslim community.

1.4 Organization of this study

This study contains six chapters. Chapter one, the introduction, provides background information about the help-seeking tendencies of immigrants, as well as the rationale for this study. In chapter two, the literature regarding the challenges faced by newcomers, their help-seeking tendencies, and the resources they use is reviewed. Chapter three provides an explanation of how the study was carried out. Chapter four consists of the results of this study, while the chapter five elaborates on the results in a broader context. Finally, chapter six summarizes this study and
presents implications for the counselling field, limitations of the study, and future directions of research.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

When South Asian Muslim immigrants first arrive in Canada, they face many challenges that can greatly affect their mental health (Naidoo, 1992; Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987). For example, newcomers must navigate through a new culture and country while trying to secure employment in a job market that places newcomers at a strong disadvantage. The effect of these challenges is that a large proportion of newcomers experience feelings of psychological distress, depression and anxiety (Berry et al., 1987). However, unlike native-born Canadians who are accustomed to seeking help from mental health services, newcomers generally use other, more culturally-appropriate resources such as social support systems and religion (Chiu, Ganeson, Clark & Marrow, 2005), because their conception of illness and health differ from those of Westerners (Tiwari & Wang, 2008). The purpose of this literature review is to explore the research around the general challenges faced by immigrants, the mental health-related beliefs held by South Asian Muslims, and the alternative resources they use.

Although newcomers move to Canada for an improved life as compared to their life in their native country, their initial months in Canada, as discussed, can be very difficult. They face numerous challenges such as finding employment and acculturating to the Canadian culture. Following is a further explanation of these challenges.

2.1 Challenges faced by newcomers

Moving to a new country can be beneficial, adventurous and rewarding as people leave their home countries to seek new opportunities (Suarez-Oresco, 2000). However, immigrating can also be discouraging, disappointing and stressful if immigrants find that their expectations for their new home country were too high (Suarez-Oresco, 2000). Migrants may face various challenges as they try to settle into their new homes, such as employment and financial difficulties, acculturative stress and discrimination (Berry et al., 1987). These challenges can have a negative impact on their psychological wellbeing (Naidoo, 1992).

2.1.1 Employment and financial difficulties
According to Galarneau and Morissette (2008), one of the most prominent challenges reported by immigrants is finding employment that matches their education and skill level. In 2006, the proportion of university-educated immigrants employed in jobs that did not require education past high school was 28% for immigrant men and 40% for immigrant women (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008). Newly-arrived immigrants have difficulty finding skills-matched employment for various reasons. Firstly, they may be unfamiliar with the Canadian job market and the job application process (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). Secondly, immigrants for whom English is a second language may find difficulty in meet their potential employers’ fluency demands (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). Thirdly, many employers do not recognize university degrees and experience from developing countries leaving immigrants with no credentials and unimpressive resumes (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004).

The inability to find employment that matches one’s skill level does not only contribute to job dissatisfaction, but also causes great financial strains on recently-arrived immigrants. Galarneau and Morissette (2004) found that in 2001, 37% to 48% of South Asian male immigrants were working in jobs that did not match their skill level, and thus were earning 42% less per week than their Canadian-born counterparts in jobs that matched their skill level. For many South Asian immigrants, there can actually be a sharp decrease in their Canadian standard of living as compared to how they were living in their home countries (Khan, 2005). Currently, 34.6% of South Asian families live below the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off with half of these families live under the poverty line (South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, 2008). The financial burden on immigrants and their families can often result in physical and mental health problems (Samuel, 2009).

Within immigrant populations, unemployment and underemployment have been associated with increased rates of depression and anxiety, acculturative stress and adaptation difficulties (Aycan & Berry, 1996). For many visible minority cultures, employment is not only a source of income but also a contributor to one’s sense of self-worth, recognition, and social status. Therefore, working in a position that undermines one’s qualifications can lead to feelings of frustration, sadness, anger and hopelessness, which are all hallmarks of depression. Furthermore, unemployment can lead to adaptation difficulties as the unemployed individual has fewer opportunities to interact with the dominant society, resulting in feelings of alienation (Aycan & Berry, 1996). In a study by Starr and Roberts (1982), immigrants who were employed and
satisfied with their jobs displayed an easier time adapting to their host country and experienced a lesser degree of acculturative stress.

2.1.2 Psychological distress due to acculturative stress

Acculturative stress is a major source of distress for immigrants. Berry et al. (1987) define acculturation as the cultural and psychological changes that occur in individuals after their culture has continued contact with the host culture. Acculturative stress therefore occurs when “individuals try to adopt a new culture and incorporate unfamiliar cultural traits of the host society into their own” (Samuel, 2009, p. 17., 1992). Research in the area of South Asian North Americans has demonstrated that despite the fact that South Asians are a large minority, they still experience discrimination (Khan, 2005; Ralston, 1996; George & Chaze, 2009). Participants report having difficulty finding employment not only because of their credentials but also because of their accents or the way they dress (Samuel, 2009). Others describe challenges in finding housing; many landlords would refuse to rent their properties to South Asian immigrants even though they met all the requirements of the ideal tenant (Ralston, 1996).

A newcomer is also faced with the task of balancing between becoming acculturated to the host culture without losing their own cultural identity. Adopting the dominant society’s values at the cost of one’s native cultural values can result in feelings of guilt and depression (Ayers, Hofstetter, Usita, Irvin, Kang & Hovell, 2009). On the other hand, becoming acculturated can decrease stress and depression as it becomes easier to integrate into society and find employment (Ayers et al., 2009). This balancing act is highly relevant to South Asian families as they struggle to instil their cultural and religious values in their children who have become significantly acculturated.

Samuel (2009) found that one of the biggest challenges South Asian women living in the Atlantic faced was the intergenerational and cultural gap between the parents and the children. Hwang (2006) has named this phenomenon “Acculturative Family Distancing.” Children of immigrants acculturate to the host culture more quickly than their parents due to increased contact with the host society through school. Many children of immigrants quickly become fluent in English at the cost of abandoning their parents’ native languages, causing a breakdown in communication as the parents speak one language and the children speak another (Samuel, 2009). As children socialize with individuals from the dominant culture, the differences between
them and the “other” children are highlighted even greater. The children then tend to try to distance themselves away from their families and their cultural values in an effort to fit in more with the dominant culture (Hwang, 2006). Parents often expressed great distress and frustration as they watched their children adopt alien cultural values over their own (Samuel, 2009).

In summary, many recently-arrived immigrants face several different challenges as they settle into Canada. They experience difficulty in finding employment because their credentials are often from a foreign, developing country and thus are not acknowledged in the Canadian job market. Furthermore, acculturative stressors such as intergenerational conflict cause tension within the family unit for many immigrants. The combination of these and other stressors involved in settling in a new country frequently has a negative impact on the mental health of immigrants. Despite the likelihood that many immigrants could benefit from mainstream mental health services, they typically under-use such services. The following section in the literature review explores beliefs held by South Asian Muslims toward health and illness with the intent of explaining why this population may seek assistance for their mental health problems from sources other than counselling and psychotherapy.

2.2 Mental health related beliefs held by South Asian Muslims

South Asian Muslims typically base their beliefs about mental health (and health in general) on the principles of holism, resilience and religiosity (Rai, 2008). Unlike modern Western models of health which view the mind and body as two separate entities, for South Asian Muslims the mind, body, spirit and environment are all linked and intertwined (Carter & Rashidi, 2003). Maintaining balance and harmony among these four elements is the key to living a healthy, peaceful and happy life (Carter & Rashidi, 2003). Similarly, if there are problems in any one of these areas of life, it is believed to affect the individual in all other areas as well (Carter & Rashidi, 2003). Consequently, if an individual is emotionally troubled then one can expect them to also feel physically unwell, unrest in their spirit and tensions in their interpersonal relationships. A study by Malik (2000) in Britain, demonstrated how South Asian Muslims view the intersection of one’s social, emotional, physical and spiritual health. Malik (2000) presented a vignette that consisted of an individual exhibiting depressive symptoms to a group of Pakistanis and British Pakistanis (Pakistanis who have immigrated or were born in Britain). She then asked them to describe what was wrong with the individual, what the causes of their sadness
were and what sort of treatment the individual should seek. Malik (2000) found that most of her participants attributed the cause of sadness to external factors such as interpersonal issues, circumstance and lack of faith, rather than inner emotions, cognitions and psychological states. Furthermore, the words “depression” and “distress” were used in object-relational ways such that they were phenomena that were occurring outside of the individual’s body, often affecting the heart most severely (Malik, 2000). Thus Malik’s participants explained the individual’s physical ailments as a manifestation of the psychological distress the individual was experiencing (Malik, 2000). Many people of ethnic minorities, particularly South Asians, will manifest their mental distress in physical symptoms (Moodley, 2006). Although Western doctors may label this expression as “somatization,” South Asians believe that the heart is central to all elements of a human being therefore if one is feeling distressed in the mind, that distress will express itself in the heart, causing cardiac problems (Moodley, 2006).

The participants in the Malik (2000) study suggested several modes of treatment for the depressed individual within the discussed vignette. First, they suggested that the individual should try to become stronger, think positively and become active again. In many Muslim cultures, resiliency and courage are highly admirable and desirable traits (Dwairy, 1998). Children from a young age are taught to tolerate pain and unhappiness with patience and perseverance because all events in life are preordained by God, and it would be blasphemous to weep or question God’s decisions (Dwairy, 1998). Therefore, many hardships that Westerners would deem as traumatizing or difficult may be perceived by South Asian Muslims as a part of life that must be accepted (Laungani, 2004). This is also the case with psychological distress and mental illness. Furthermore, Muslims are often taught to ignore their feelings and are actively discouraged from sharing their personal problems with strangers for fear of shaming their families or burdening others (Dwairy, 1998). The needs of the individual are sacrificed for the greater good of the family unit, so even if an individual is in distress due to a family decision, they must respect the decision if it means that harmony within the family will be maintained (Hall & Livingston, 2006). It is actually dysfunctional in South Asian cultures for an individual to only think of themselves and their own happiness (Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004). The clinical implication of this resistance to individualism, as well as the resilience and courage that Muslims try to exhibit, is that they will often wait until their illness is absolutely unbearable and they have
exhausted all traditional means of healing before they seek outside, professional help (Dwairy, 1998).

Secondly, participants felt that interpersonal issues were a major contributor to the individual’s distress, recommending that the individual should try to mend their relationships (Malik, 2000). Laungani (1992, as cited in Malik, 2000) stated that the only way to understand a South Asian society is to examine it through a communal and familial lens. In Islam, the familial unit is the core of society and is considered sacred (Hall & Livingston, 2006). One’s family is the source of one’s identity, social support systems, beliefs, and practices and so all attempts should be made in order to preserve and promote healthy relationships (Hall & Livingston, 2006). Furthermore, Nath (2005) reported that the social make-up of South Asian countries is often more conducive to mental health treatment because of the accessibility of strong and numerous social support systems. However, immigrants who move away from South Asia and are accustomed to communal treatment may suffer more from psychological distress in North America due to the lack of social networks (Nath, 2005). In this case, a more internal coping system may come into use, such as prayer and religion.

The most common treatment suggested to the individual by participants in the fore mentioned vignette was praying and increasing one’s proximity to God (Malik, 2000). In Islam, illness, and particularly mental illness, is believed to be due to a distance between God and His follower. Therefore, one way to alleviate the illness is to get closer to God, as God alone has the ultimate power to heal a person (Husain, 1998). Practicing Muslims believe there are several methods of getting closer to God in order to facilitate divine healing: praying, fasting, almsgiving or trying to live life more accordingly to the tenants of Islam.

Another source of mental illness and negative emotions, aligned with Islamic perceptions of mental health is possession and black magic (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999). Many Muslims believe in spirits, or jinns, that are believed to have the power to take over a person’s body and cause them to behave in an erratic manner or in a way that seems out of character for the person. Another feared supernatural source of emotional distress for many Muslims is the evil eye, a condition which causes misfortune and lethargy for a person due to the ill will or jealousy of another. Therefore, although an individual might actually be suffering from a mental illness such
as schizophrenia, some Muslims may attribute the delusions to spirits or the evil eye (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999).

Sheikh and Furnham (2000) conducted a cross-cultural study, examining mental health beliefs and help seeking behaviours in British, British Asian and Pakistani individuals. The authors found that the Muslims in their particular study were more likely than any of the other religious groups to believe in supernatural causes of mental illness. The Muslim participants were also less likely to seek professional medical help and more likely to seek the help of traditional or religious healers (Sheikh & Furnham, 2000). South Asian Muslims may not use mainstream mental health services as often as Canadians because to them a psychologist would not be the appropriate resource for exorcising a demon, removing a curse or coming closer to God (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999). They might alternatively go to traditional healers and religious figures, who are the experts in these supernatural fields (Chiu et al., 2005). As such, in order to make their services more relevant to the Pakistani population, the psychological and psychiatric fields in Pakistan have been training their students in the basic teachings of Islam and the integration of religion in psychotherapy (Murray, 2002).

In sum, South Asian Muslims view their health as the intersection of their physical, emotional, spiritual and social state. Disruption in any one of these states results in general ill health caused by a number of possible factors. For example, many South Asian Muslims believe that some illnesses may be due to interpersonal problems or spiritual issues. Treatment for illness therefore is multi-modal, often combining one’s inner strength, family and faith in order to reinstate balance in one’s life. In the following section, a more detailed examination of key treatment resources commonly used by South Asians is offered. The role of social support systems and religion in the lives of South Asian Muslims is paramount within this section.

2.3 Indigenous resources used by South Asian Muslims

Over time, cultural groups have developed their own explanations and conceptualizations of “abnormality,” mental health and well-being, and have identified culture-bound ways of coping with problems (Lee & Armstrong, 1995). As these cultural groups have migrated, they have carried the knowledge and practices with them to their new homes (Dein & Sembhi, 2001; Ali, Milstein & Marzuk, 2005). Therefore, many immigrants in Canada have been known to use indigenous healing methods in tandem with the Western health services to cope with various
types of physical and psychosocial problems (Moodley & West, 2005; Hilton et al., 2001). The following section will examine two main resources used most commonly by South Asian Muslims in their efforts to heal themselves. First, the importance of social support systems in minimizing the effects of psychological distress will be explored and second, the positive impact of religion and faith on one’s wellbeing will be examined.

2.3.1 Social support systems

Social support systems have been shown to be crucial contributors to an individual’s mental health (Cohen, Yoon & Johnstone, 2009). Social support is described as an individual’s perception of the amount of support received by the important people in that individual’s life (Maulik, Eaton & Bradshaw, 2010). The emotional, financial and instrumental support available from one’s social network can help an individual cope with several challenges (Gellis, 2003). For example, Maulik, Eaton and Bradshaw (2010) studied the impact of social support on moderating the negative effects of a significant life event like a death of a spouse or loss of a job on over a thousand Baltimore residents. They found that high levels of social support decreased the risk of psychological distress in the participants and that social support was shown to have protective effects on the effects of psychosocial issues. The authors recommended that counsellors should help clients in distress establish strong social networks soon after a significant life event to prevent their distress from metamorphosing into a mental illness (Maulik et al., 2010). For newcomers, this would mean that it would be crucial for them to establish a social network soon after their immigration in order to help them prevent isolation and buffer the effects of grief, loss, discrimination, and other acculturative stressors.

Immigrants with adequate social support systems have been shown to possess less depressive symptomology and comorbidity (Kiang, Grzywacz, Marin, Arcury & Quandt, 2010). Furthermore they are less likely to be affected by acculturative and normative stressors (Kiang et al., 2010). The result is that individuals with adequate social support are also less likely to access mental health services (Sherbourne, 1988).

Social support systems play an especially important role in the lives of South Asian immigrants (George & Chaze, 2009). Given South Asia’s collectivistic culture, relationships are given utmost importance and value (Ayub, 2000). One’s family is not only a source of comfort but also a source of identity, information and counsel (Ahmad, Shik, Vanza, Cheung, George & Stewart,
2010). It is crucial for newcomers to have access to social support systems, either by continuing to be connected with family in their native countries or by establishing new social networks in Canada. In recent decades, due to the influx of South Asian immigrants, many newcomers are part of a “chain immigration” where they are in a line of family members who immigrate to Canada one after the other (Kuo & Tsai, 1986). Chain migration facilitates social networking as newcomers often already have family members in Canada and so they are not isolated.

In addition to seeking external help from social support systems, individuals may also turn internally and seek support from religious and spiritual sources.

2.3.2 Religious support

Regular prayer has been shown to decrease the risk of physical and psychological diseases and disorders (Cohen, Yoon & Johnstone, 2009). In a meta-analysis of 724 studies on religion and health, 66% of the studies found a positive relationship between the two factors (Keonig, McCullough & Larson, 2001). Additionally, Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2010) found a similar positive relationship in their summary and critique of empirical studies on Islam and psychology. They found that Islamic religiosity contributed to improved mental health and high levels of happiness, optimism, and satisfaction with life (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2010). The positive effects of religion and spirituality have been attributed to several factors. For example, many religions promote a healthier lifestyle because they encourage moderation in all things and strongly discourage addictive behaviours (McIntosh, 1995). Furthermore, religions provide followers with a positive worldview of hope and good (McIntosh, 1995). Lastly, religious individuals are often regular attendants of congregations and the congregational support can contribute to the mental health of an individual (McIntosh, 1995).

For immigrants, as they face the many challenges of settling in a new country, praying can be a very effectual coping skill as they may feel comforted and less isolated recounting their worries to a higher, kinder and omnipresent being. In a study examining the difficult experiences of Bangladeshi women living in a low-income neighbourhood in United Kingdom, the women reported that private prayer was their primary coping mechanism (Barn & Sidhu, 2004). Other studies exploring challenges in the lives of Muslim women have found that praying provides comfort, solace, patience and peace in times of hardship (Currer, 1984; Westwood, Couloute, Desai, Matthew, & Piper, 1989; Belliappa, 1991; George & Chaze, 2009).
Pargament (1997) describes how religion can offer a different frame of reference for hardships. Many religions provide multiple explanations for difficulties faced in one’s life. For example, since many people will turn to religious faith in hard times, hardships can be seen as an opportunity for spiritual growth. In addition, many religions, including Islam, teach that by surviving through challenges, one’s sins are absolved, thus carrying them closer to paradise in the hereafter. It is important to note that religions do not negate the existence of problems; instead they frame challenges as opportunities to grow rather than focusing solely on the pain (Pargament, 1997).

In addition to personal practices of faith, many immigrants also find religious institutions to be beneficial. Hirscham (2004) discussed many of the roles that religious institutions may play in the lives of immigrants. For example, religious institutions that cater to a specific ethnic population provide cultural continuity for immigrants and a refuge from the daily acculturative stress and discrimination. Generally, as newcomers to a novel country, immigrants are challenged in even the most mundane tasks because they have to constantly interpret and respond to their new environment in a culturally appropriate manner. However, once these same anxious individuals step into their churches, mosques or temples, it is as if they are stepping into their native countries once more, where they are no longer different or in the minority (Hirscham, 2004).

Many religious institutions also provide religious and cultural classes for the children of immigrants. As previously discussed, a very large concern for many immigrants, and particularly those who are Muslim, is conserving their faith and culture in their children (Haddad & Lummis, 1987). Many mosques offer native language classes and Sunday school classes that teach children about Islam and its teachings. The classes for the younger generation help pass on the traditional values that the immigrants were taught in their home country (Haddad & Lummis, 1987).

Perhaps the most important role religious institutions play for immigrants is that of an information provider (George & Chaze, 2009). Many churches, temples and mosques will have community centres attached to them, which offer a number of services. For example, the Islamic Centre of Canada in Mississauga, Ontario offers religious services, counselling, an Islamic elementary and high school, as well as a housing cooperative (Islamic Society of North America,
The Islamic Foundation Mosque in Scarborough, Ontario offers counselling services, an employment centre and ESL courses for its members (Islamic Foundation of Toronto, 2009).

If the institution itself does not provide information, then it fosters a social environment that allows lived experience and information sharing among immigrants. Often the more experienced congregants will help the newer immigrant with practical issues such as housing, employment and education (George & Chaze, 2009). This type of informal sharing of information is seen by South Asian immigrants as more useful than the services offered by mainstream community resources due to the personally-catered information they receive from friends and family (George & Chaze, 2009).

Overall, although recently-arrived immigrants have difficulty accessing mainstream mental health services, they do have additional resources that they can access: their families and their faith. Social support systems in the lives of South Asian Muslims can provide moral and emotional support to newcomers in Canada who are struggling with acculturative stressors. Furthermore, the religiosity of newcomers can help to stimulate positive and empowering feelings, strengthening the individual and promoting their wellbeing.

When South Asian Muslims first arrive in Canada, they face many challenges. For example, they may face financial difficulties as they struggle to find employment that matches their educational and professional background. Also, there is a discrepancy between the culture in Canada and the culture in South Asia and this discrepancy can lead to various forms of acculturative stress and racial discrimination. These challenges have negative effects on the mental health of immigrants, often contributing to increasing rates of depression and anxiety in the South Asian community and many of them could greatly benefit from the services of mental health providers. However, due to difference in medical models and health-related beliefs, many South Asian Muslims avoid using mental health services. Alternatively, they may turn to their indigenous healing methods such as social and religious supports.

In conclusion, although immigration is a difficult process, there are resources available to immigrants. Some of these resources, in the form of family, cultural communities, and religion, can provide immigrants with the emotional support they need to help manage the daily struggles of moving and settling into a new country. It would serve the health service providers well to acquire an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by immigrants and how they resolve
these difficulties. By acquiring this knowledge, service providers will better understand the needs of their clients, as well as be in a position to take advantage of the indigenous resources available to these communities.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This section will review the methodology used in this study. To recapitulate, this study sought to examine the resources used by recently-arrived South Asian Muslim immigrants to help them settle into Canada. More specifically, the study explored the challenges faced by newcomers and the help-seeking behaviours of the newcomers in response to those challenges.

In order to determine the resources accessed by Muslim immigrants, interviews were conducted with South Asian Muslim immigrants to elicit their experiences of settling in Canada. A qualitative study was used to allow a deeper understanding of the help-seeking behaviours of participants by focusing on how an individual interprets and explains the phenomenological experience of psychological distress and recovery (Choudhuri, 2005).

The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed according to Grounded Theory methodologies. Grounded Theory is a popular qualitative methodology developed in the late 1960s by sociologists, Glaser and Strauss. The crux of this inductive methodology is that a theory is directly generated from the data collected, thus grounding the theory in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is a reiterative process where the investigator collects and analyzes the data, and uses the analysis to further inform how future data will be collected. The data is sorted into categories and themes, which are assembled to form a theory to explain the behaviour of the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded Theory methodologies are appropriate for studies in which previous theories are not readily available and where the investigator wishes to understand a participant’s behaviour from the participant’s worldview (Payne, 2007). Participants describe their experiences of certain social and psychological processes from their own contextual framework, allowing the investigator to collect an indigenous understanding of the behaviour or problem (Pidgeon, 1996). In the context of this study, Grounded Theory helped create a model that describes the help-seeking behaviours of an under-researched population (South Asian Muslims) and is tailored to the perspectives and assumptions of this group. The findings from this study can inform the mental health field of how South Asian Muslim immigrants conceptualize their psychological distress and what resources they choose to access and why.
3.1 Participants

Ten participants were interviewed for this study. The inclusion criteria were the following:

1. Participants had to self-identify as South Asian (i.e., who were born in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka or Nepal) and Muslim.

2. Participants had to be recent immigrants, immigrating to Canada from their birth country no more than five years ago.

3. Participants had to be able to communicate in English or Urdu.

The sole exclusion criterion was that the participants could not be refugees in Canada. Research has demonstrated that the settling experience of refugees differs greatly from the experience of immigrants and therefore the two experiences should not be generalized together (Kahnlou, 2009).

Although flyers were posted in South Asian and Muslim community centres, mosques, and small businesses, they did not result in any participants. Participants were then recruited through social networking and snowballing, where individuals who already had participated were asked to recommend other potential participants.

As proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), participants were recruited according to theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is the process of collecting, coding and analyzing the data simultaneously, using the emerging categories to guide further collection of data. As the categories began to take shape, the interview questions were modified in order to explore areas that needed further explanation and definition. Participants were recruited until the core categories were theoretically saturated. In other words, recruitment continued until the incoming data was no longer adding new properties to the categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.2 Interview procedure

The interviews were conducted for an hour to an hour and a half with ten subjects in either in Urdu or English, depending on the subject’s level of comfort with either language. Most
interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, with the exception of one which was conducted at a local coffee shop in order to accommodate the participant.

Interview questions were first formulated according to questions asked in previous dissertations about immigrant experience and religious coping (Khan, 2005; Kim, 2006). As the analysis process began, the questions were altered and then fine-tuned to the themes of this research. This process is outlined in the Grounded Theory process (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

There were four parts to the interview. In the first part, the information letter and the consent form were reviewed (see Appendix B and C) to verify that the participant understood the study thoroughly. Secondly, the participants were asked to fill out a demographic information form which asked for a pseudonym, their age, occupation and the amount of time they had lived in Canada (see Appendix D). Thirdly, the participants were interviewed about their immigration experiences, the challenges they faced and the resources they used to face those challenges (see Appendix E). Lastly, the participants were given a chance to ask any further questions and raise any issues they may have had throughout the interview.

3.3 Data analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews in Urdu were translated into English. The transcripts were then analyzed using the methods of Grounded Theory. More specifically, the data was coded and analyzed according to the Constant Comparison Method (C.C.M., Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The Constant Comparison Method was developed in order to give qualitative investigators a systematic approach to coding and analyzing their data for the purpose of developing a theory. Since developing a theory requires constant modifications and new data collection, a method was needed to allow researchers to systematically and continuously code and analyze their data throughout the theory-building process (Glaser, 1965). There are four stages in conducting data analysis according to Constant Comparison Method. Each stage eventually grows into the next but it is not a strictly linear process as the investigator can return to earlier stages at any point in time (Glaser, 1965). The following are the stages:

1. Coding the data

Once the data was collected, the transcripts were reviewed and important passages that were relevant to the issue at hand were classified in appropriate categories. The initial
coding is called open coding (Payne, 2007). The classification requires the investigator to constantly compare the passage in question with the other passages in the category as well as passages from other categories to ensure that it is being categorized properly. The constant comparison generates theoretical properties of the category as each passage could add another dimension to the category, or describe a condition under which the category would occur, or delineate a consequence of the category or display the relationship of this category to other categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I constantly compared the passages in a particular category, I was able to further establish the theoretical boundaries and parameters of that category.

2. Integrating the properties and the categories
As the properties of the categories became more established, I compared the passages to the properties of the category rather than the individual passages. This allowed me to better integrate the properties of a category as all the passages were incorporated into the core characteristics of that particular category (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition, I integrated categories within themselves as well as in between categories; axial coding allowed me to establish links and patterns between categories (Payne, 2007).

3. Defining the boundaries of the model
Once the model began to be established, I pruned and consolidated the categories to increase the focus and depth of the boundary (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process is called theoretical coding, as the categories become less descriptive and more analytical (Payne, 2007). It is also at this point that many of the categories became theoretically saturated, meaning additional passages were no longer needed since they did not add any new dimensions to the category (Glaser, 1965).

4. Creating the model
I constructed the model by reviewing and organizing all the memos that had been created throughout the coding process (Glaser, 1965). Throughout the entire research process I maintained a diary of analytical memos. The memos were collections of insights, hunches, interpretations, questions and notes that I encountered as I analyzed the data (Marrow, 2005). I later used the memos to formulate the model by providing a rationale for the codification (Glaser, 1965). The actual data was then used to illustrate properties
and concepts within the core themes. In this manner, I created a model to describe the psychological experiences and help-seeking behaviours of South Asian Muslim immigrants settling in Canada.

3.4 Ensuring the quality of qualitative research

Qualitative methods are quickly gaining popularity in the field of counselling psychology and measures have been taken to establish ways to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the research conducted. Marrow (2005) speaks of four elements required to ensure the quality of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. To ensure credibility, the participants were asked to verify the analysis of their transcripts to make certain that the researcher had correctly understood what the participants were trying to convey in their narratives. However, none of the participants agreed to review their analysis. Instead, peer researchers were asked to review the raw data and analysis to help elaborate the analysis. To ensure transferability (i.e., determining for which populations the theory will be relevant), detailed notes explicitly describing the context of the research process were made. In other words, I took note of my background and beliefs, the relationships I developed with the participants, and the context in which the data was collected. To ensure dependability, analytical memos and an audit trail (i.e., a chronological record of all research events) were created throughout the research process so that a third person may repeat the study if they wish to do so. Lastly, to ensure conformability (i.e., verifying that the data is tied together in a manner that maintains the integrity of the data), peer researchers were asked to review the entire analysis process (Marrow, 2005).

In addition, I maintained a self-reflective journal where I recorded my experiences, reactions, assumptions and biases that arose throughout the research process. The purpose of the journal was to become aware of my subjective and personal understanding of the data so that I could either choose to set aside my personal input as I analyzed the data or to incorporate it as part of the data (Marrow, 2005). The journal was especially important for this project as I am a South Asian Muslim myself, with immigrant parents. Although my lived experiences contributed to the better understanding of my participants, there was also a danger that my assumptions and biases as a South Asian Muslim could have coloured my perception in a manner that is not reflective of the participants’ experiences. For this reason, I was very vigilant in noting my thoughts and
reflections within the journal to stay aware of my subjectivity as I collected and analyzed the data.

3.5 Participant descriptions

A total of ten participants, three men and seven women, were interviewed. The ten participants included three couples, two married women, one widow and one woman who had separated from her husband. The mean age of the participants was thirty-eight years, and they had been in Canada for an average of twenty one months. All but two of the participants (Najo and Nikki) are Pakistani. The participants were given the following pseudonyms: Najo, Nikki, Sam, Neelo, Adi, Mon, Uzma, Shaz, Tashi and Sara.

Najo and Nikki

Najo and Nikki are originally from India but lived in Oman for several years before immigrating to Canada two years ago. Najo is a forty-six year old family physician who is currently unemployed. He has passed the accreditation exams but is having difficulty in securing a residency, which is a requirement for international doctors if they wish to receive their Canadian license to practice. Nikki is a forty-two year old software tester. She was a housewife in Oman but is currently looking for employment in Canada. Together they have three children, the oldest is fourteen and the youngest is six. They are currently living in a rented townhouse.

Sam and Neelo

Sam and Neelo emigrated from Pakistan to Canada in December 2008. Sam is forty-five years old and Neelo is thirty-eight. In Pakistan they owned and ran a computer retail business. When they moved to Canada, a family friend offered Sam a position as a sales representative in his computer store, which Sam accepted. Soon after, Neelo also found a position as a sales representative in a computer store. Sam and Neelo share a rented two bedroom basement apartment with their two young sons who are in middle school.

Adi and Mon

Adi and Mon are a young couple from Pakistan who immigrated to Canada in February 2009. Adi is a thirty-three year old IT consultant who is currently employed in his field. Mon is a thirty-two year old family physician who is currently unemployed but studying for her
accreditation exams. They have two young children, ages 6 and 3, and they have recently bought their first home and car.

Uzma

Uzma is a twenty-four year old woman who immigrated to Canada from Pakistan in October 2008 after marrying her husband who had been living in Canada for several years and has an established career as a finance consultant. She immigrated shortly after completing her undergraduate degree in computer engineering and is currently busy taking care of their infant son. She hopes to start looking for employment as soon as her son is eighteen months old.

Shaz

Shaz has been living in Canada since July 2009. She emigrated from Pakistan when she was thirty-four to join her husband who was already living and working in Canada. Shaz was a full-time teacher in Pakistan for eight years and she is currently seeking employment, as well as admission to an Early Childhood Education program. Shaz’s husband, who is a civil engineer by trade, and has been living in Canada for several years, is currently working in factory. The couple lives in a rented apartment.

Tashi

Tashi is a forty-seven year old homemaker and mother of three. She immigrated to Canada in 2005 with her thirteen year old son. Although Tashi has a law degree, she has rarely worked as a lawyer either in Canada, or in her home country of Pakistan. Her husband recently passed away but Tashi and her family have been fortunate enough to be very well-provided for and live comfortably in an up-scale neighbourhood of Toronto.

Sara

Sara arrived in Canada pregnant, in May 2005 with her husband and her three year old son. When they first arrived, both Sara and her husband worked in an assembly line in a factory, despite the fact that Sara is a teacher with a Master’s degree and her husband is an environmental engineer. They lived with Sara’s brother-in-law in his basement for three and a half years. Sara’s in-laws were verbally, emotionally and physically abusive towards her and in January 2009, after her husband attempted to divorce her and gain custody of the children during a trip to Pakistan,
Sara fled back to Canada with her children. At that point, Sara was placed into contact with the Catholic Family Services as she had nowhere to live, and was provided a social worker who helped her secure housing in a housing co-op and to gain legal custody of her two children. She is currently working part-time as a supply teacher in a daycare. Meanwhile, her husband is living in Pakistan because he has criminal charges of battery laid against him in Canada.
Chapter 4
Results

This qualitative study sought to examine the resources South Asian Muslim newcomers use in order to cope with the challenges of settling in Canada. Open-ended interviews were conducted, asking the participants’ about their experiences with immigrating, the challenges they faced, and the resources they accessed. Ten South Asian Muslims were interviewed, three men and seven women. Eight of the participants were from Pakistan and two were from India. On average, the participants had been living in Canada for the past two years. Through the interviews, it was found that the primary sources of support for the participants sought support primarily were from their families and their faith.

The analysis of the interviews resulted in the emergence of the following core category: Seeking support from faith and family in the face of psychological challenges due to settlement. Under this core category there were four themes: 1) The immigration experience, 2) Psychological stresses due to the settlement process, 3) Resources accessed by newcomers, and 4) Positive outlook on life in Canada. The categories aim to describe not only the emotions the South Asian Muslim newcomers experienced as they struggled to settle in Canada but also how these newcomers addressed these emotions to maintain their mental health. In response to psychological stressors, the participants looked to their family, communities and faith to provide them with emotional and moral support, as well as useful information and services. The combination of resources available to these newcomers allowed them to develop resilience against the stressors of settling in a new country and to still view their immigrating experiences as overall positive. This section will explore each theme in detail using direct quotes from participants to define the category, starting with the participants’ immigration experience. The participants had various reasons and expectations for immigration, which later impacted their perceptions of the whole experience.

4.1 Immigration experience

This brief section examines both the participants’ reasons for immigration and their expectations of what settling in Canada would be like. Most of the participants had a number of reasons for immigration such as political refuge, financial improvement and enhanced opportunities for their
children. However, the participants differentiated in their expectations of life in Canada and this later impacted how they experienced settling in Canada.

4.1.1 Motivation for Immigration

Immigration to a country over ten thousand kilometres away required much deliberation and thought for the participants of this study. For most of them, there were several factors contributing to their decision to immigrate, although the main ones were safety and security. Most participants came from Pakistan, where over the past few years the political instability has contributed to an increase in crime and terrorism and a decrease in the living standards. Tashi shared, “it was...very frustrating to live in Pakistan, you know. The energy crisis…the crime rate was going up, and no security…I don’t want to go back because Pakistan had an acute energy problem and it’s not even safe and it is a very corrupt society.” Furthermore, Pakistan’s volatile environment has negatively impacted its economy, scaring away current and potential investors. Out of all the participants, Sam and Neelo felt the impact of political instability on their businesses most acutely. Sam became frustrated that despite their greatest efforts, their business was still suffering due to the instability:

    Political situation totally messed things up...like if this month we have had this much progress then next month we should have that much progress but what would happen is that all of a sudden, for three days the whole city would shut down, or for a month, our area becomes so politically unstable that we cannot even move around freely. This is what was happening and we were coming down so quickly that other than that trust [trust on God] to help us survive, we had nothing else.

For all the participants with children, seeking a better future with greater opportunities for their children was a major motivator to emigrate from their established lives. They wanted to take advantage of the reputable educational institutions in Canada, which would help their children to access employment all over the world. For example, Nikki explained her reasons to immigrate to Canada in these words:

    We wanted our children to enjoy the benefits that Canada has to offer for the future...we didn’t want our children to grow up in India because basically India lacks, being a third world country, it lacks all this.
In general, participants were looking for a better life in Canada. They were hoping for stability and improvement in their lifestyles. At the same time, due to hearing stories from family and friends who had already immigrated, some of the participants were also aware of the difficulties of finding employment in Canada and were thus anxious about the move. Their expectations and feelings before immigration are illustrated below.

4.1.2 Participants’ expectations from the immigration process

Although many of the participants had significant reasons for leaving their native countries, there was much apprehension and worry. Often these feelings came from stories shared by other family members who immigrated to the developed world and struggled greatly to establish themselves. Their families in Canada and the United States warned the participants of the difficulty in finding work and the expensive costs of living. They heard stories about doctors and engineers working in factories or restaurants. For Najo and Nikki, there was so much unease involved in leaving Najo’s established and successful medical practice lives in Oman, that it took them three years after receiving their immigration papers to finally leave Oman.

Najo: So everybody, you know, some of the relatives were cautioning us in fact. Like you are going to leave a fully settled life and having a good job and doing well for the time being over there so you know the relatives, they were just cautioning us that…I should be aware of things, like it is difficult to get jobs

Not only did the participants have apprehension about establishing careers, they also worried about the effect of the Canadian liberal cultural environment on their children. Infamous for the individualistic, modern and “amoral” lifestyle, Canadian culture seemed to be in sharp contrast to the South Asian culture the participants were accustomed to. Sam was warned by his friends in Pakistan that his children would be ruined if he moved to Canada. However, after a few years, those very same people were encouraging Sam to leave Pakistan as soon as possible because of the worsening living conditions within the country. As circumstances changed, so did priorities. Uzma too was warned about the corruptive nature of Canadian culture by her husband. She recounts one phone conversation where her husband told her,

“You will see that if we are not Muslim and if we don’t have a strong belief then we will be moved off of our track. Because here, it does not take long to be ruined…you feel that everything here is normal, that everyone drinks, what’s wrong with that?”
For Adi, who did not know anyone in Canada, he felt that after all the trouble and wait that he had to go through just to procure immigration status, that things would surely be easier afterwards,

Because, when we applied for immigration, there was too much hype. You know, the way they take the time, you think when you go there, then everything is finished. You are free of problems.

In sum, the participants generally had hopes for an improved life in Canada, even if it would require hard work. The current political and economical condition of South Asia was not conducive to the type of life improvement the participants were seeking, so they decided to move to Canada in the hope of achieving their dreams and offering their children better opportunities. However, the participants were also apprehensive about certain challenges they were expecting to meet in Canada such as employment difficulties and a clash of cultural values. In the end, their apprehensions were warranted as many of their fears were realized when they arrived in Canada. The participants struggled with various challenges during their settlement, which are explored in further detail below.

### 4.2 Psychological stressors due to the settlement process

Settling into a new country for the first time can be a very difficult process. Newcomers have to learn to navigate a new country, a new language and a new culture in a relatively short time period. The newcomers in this study described several of the challenges they faced as they tried to establish a life in Canada: the loneliness, isolation, and homesickness, clash of values, discrimination, the stresses of re-establishing careers in Canada and the loss of social status. These challenges can be classified into two categories: acculturative stress and socio-economic stress.

#### 4.2.1 Acculturative stressors

The participants reported experiencing several types of acculturative stressors such as lack of a social network and difficulty in maintaining one’s values. These challenges are further explored below.
4.2.1.1 Inaccessible social support systems

As Toronto’s South Asian population is growing, the chance that many newcomers already have social contacts in Canada before they immigrate is high. Indeed, for many of the participants in this study, they had a large network of family members in Toronto at the time of their arrival. However, there are still newcomers who come to Canada having little to no social contacts in the country. Coping with the stresses of immigrating, in isolation, is the predominant challenge for these individuals when they are more accustomed to having a strong social support system around them. For example, Sara, Tashi and Adi described their isolation in this way:

Sara: First of all there is a new environment, a new experience, everything new, language, culture, everything, society…Then even in the home, problems with my husband. What can I do alone?

Tashi: The hardest part was getting used to the poor weather and then loneliness; I didn’t know too many people…Not good. Very lonely. Very depressing.

Adi: The loss of our family’s presence was shocking…especially my children, because they moved from a very big family that were all together…So they left all those relations, suddenly they felt themselves completely alone you know so they were shocked.

The loss of social support systems compounded the participants’ feelings of being far away from their home country and contributed to feelings of depression.

As these participants tried to connect with people in Toronto, they noticed a difference in the attitudes South Asians living in Canada had towards socializing. For example, Adi and Uzma found that Canadian South Asians were very busy and did not have time for socializing. They said the following:

Adi: I would say, it is a little bit difficult. The whole community, is so much busy, to make both ends meet. They are so much busy that they don’t have time for their personal life. They don’t have time.

Uzma: No one has any time to think, it’s a very fast life. Like see, you can’t go anywhere without calling…What is this? I have to take an appointment. (laughs). This thing makes me feel bad. Sometimes you just feel like getting up and going.

The participants found it difficult to form close relationships with the South Asians living in Toronto due to insufficient opportunities to socialize and become familiar with one another. For Adi and Uzma, the fast-pace and materialistic lifestyle in Canada differs from the collective
lifestyle in Pakistan where time was always made for relationships. On the other hand, for the two single women living in Canada, Tashi and Sara struggled with the lack of privacy within the South Asian community. Tashi had this to say about her experience:

I feel, the people here, are way too narrow-minded, very judgmental. The Asians…

Previously, they used to be that oh, I was living here alone, and you know, you have all the freedom, and you are probably up to no good, all this kind of crap. And they just judge you, that, you know, she is a female living by herself, so all that. So they just presume, maybe not judgments, but very presumptuous.

Consequently, Tashi was very selective about which South Asians she befriended in order to maintain her privacy.

Newcomers can experience negative feelings due to immigration challenges and these feelings can be greatly exasperated if the newcomers do not have any social support systems in their host country. Not only is it detrimental to their mental health but these newcomers also lose the social environment necessary to help instill their cultural and religious values in their children, adding another source of acculturative stress on the newcomers.

4.2.1.2 Challenges in cultural transmission

Although the participants’ children were still relatively young (the oldest child in the group was thirteen), the parents in the study were already expressing concern over maintaining their children’s cultural and religious values. Adi felt that after a certain age, parents had to realize that the environment outside of home will probably hold a greater influence on the children than their parents will. Adi explained the challenge he anticipates in the following manner:

You can tell them to a certain extent what is right or wrong. But the external environment that is influencing them, you cannot influence that. Okay? Then if there is a different stream from home…then there is a conflict. Then they start thinking what is right or what is wrong. It might be my parents; they are from a backward country, that is why they are thinking like that. It’s not like that.

Neelo was accustomed to religious education being taught in schools in Pakistan. However, with a lack of formal teachings of religious education in Canadian schools, she now finds herself positioned as the sole teacher of these lessons for her children. She had this to say:
...because over there, whatever was there, we felt like, for the children, we are in Pakistan, it’s an Islamic environment, and everything is fine...Now, here there is nothing in the schools, there is no education, there is no religious studies...

Nikki’s daughter, who is only six, has already forgotten her native languages as she is now submerged into an English culture. Nikki can foresee problems as her daughter will grow up and have to straddle two different cultures and identities.

   My daughter has forgotten her Hindi and Urdu. She started speaking quite late but she would speak some short sentences in Urdu, which she has forgotten totally now. She only speaks in English. She will have an identity crisis when she grows up…

All of the parents were very aware of the difference between Canadian cultural values and their own cultural values and foresaw a clash of values for their children as the children will have to struggle between the culture of their parents and that of Canadian society.

Beyond the struggle of trying to adjust to Canadian culture and society, participants also struggled to meet their basic needs in their search for employment.

4.2.2 Socio-economic stressors

Once the participants arrived in Canada, their first goal was to find employment. Their dreams of a higher standard of living as compared to that in their native countries were quickly shattered as the participants realized that finding work in Canada would be a greater challenge than anticipated. Their lack of access to lucrative employment opportunities negatively impacted the participants’ standards of living in Canada, drastically distancing them from the lifestyles they were accustomed to in their native countries. Challenges in career development faced by their participants and the resultant downward social mobility are explored within this section.

4.2.2.1 Career development challenges

The greatest challenge the participants faced was re-establishing their careers in Canada. All of the participants were either working professionals or university graduates in their home countries. The frustration the participants felt (and for many, still are feeling) as they faced barrier after barrier in trying to find adequate work was palpable in every interview.
Two out of the three men interviewed were employed. Adi and Sam were working in jobs that were related to their fields. Adi had several years of working experience from Britain and Sam was working at a computer shop of a friend. Najo was unemployed despite his twenty years serving as a family physician in Oman. He has passed all of the required Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (M.C.C.E.E.) but has not been able to secure a residency.

Out of the seven women interviewed, only Neelo and Sara were employed. Neelo works as a sales representative in a computer store while Sara is a supply teacher. Out of the other five women, Shaz, Nikki and Mon are actively seeking employment. For Shaz and Nikki, their primary resource has been newcomer centres. They have attended several workshops and classes on how to apply for jobs, write resumes and conduct interviews. Thus far, they have been able to only secure volunteer positions in their fields. Mon is currently preparing for her M.C.C.E.E.

Many participants were not prepared for the length of time it would take them to find employment in their fields of work. Although they came with monetary savings, their savings quickly dwindled within the Canadian economy. Mon aptly described it: “They say that even the well will eventually become dry.” The longer it took them to find a job, the more distressed they became, as expressed by Mon and Nikki in the following statements:

Mon: ...the recession had a really bad effect on everyone else and the main thing was my husband’s job, it took him almost three to four months to find a job. But there was continuous stress, depression for the four months that if he doesn’t get a job...

Nikki: Professionally, it’s been very tough...we had spoken to a few people earlier...they had said it’s very easy if you apply for allied jobs...but when we came here, my husband started applying for those jobs right away, started sending two, three resumes everyday but no response came...no calls for interviews, no jobs and this kept on happening for a long time, happened for two, three months and then we started panicking...

Shaz was frustrated with how many restrictions were placed in the way of newcomers by employers. It made the job search process very intimidating and difficult, as can be seen by her following statement:

…but here, naturally there is lots of obligations, lots of restrictions and lots of requirements which is needed to get yourself into some kind of stream line…I am feeling very, very uncomfortable over here…this is the most problematic thing. Getting into your
Najo experienced similar frustration as he has pursued every avenue possible to make himself an eligible candidate for a medical residency. He has passed his exams, procured Canadian experience in clinics and has furthered his education at McMaster University. Yet, Najo still has not secured a residency, which is the final requirement for practicing medicine in Canada. He describes some of the thorny conditions placed on newcomer doctors that make securing a residency very difficult.

Najo: It has been pretty tough. This is one thing that is, you know, really disturbing me…They say that those internationally trained medical practitioners will be preferred who have not been out of practice for more than four years and then this time there are certain areas, they said you cannot apply for residency if you have not stayed here in Canada for more than two years so I have not yet completed my two years, so you know there is a very thin margin between the eligibility and the not getting residency. After the third year, the chances become bleak.

In sum, the participants in this study were very distressed by the job application process because of the long time it was taking in order to secure employment. They felt intimidated and confused with the process because despite their ample professional experiences, they were still not considered strong applicants for hire. The inability to secure skills-matched employment resulted in a loss of financial capital which impacted the standard of living the participants could afford in Canada. In most cases, the participants felt a sharp decrease in their self-worth as well as their socio-economic status as compared to that in their native countries. Their feelings towards their downward social mobility are examined in the following section.

4.2.2.2 Downward social mobility

A common problem for newcomers is that although they may have been professionals with decades of experience in their home countries, they are still at a disadvantage within the Canadian job market because they are newcomers. The greatest challenge was the lack of recognition given to foreign experience or education. As Nikki said, “In Canada, people like Canadian, they like Canadian education, they like Canadian experience.” Many of the participants felt devalued as Canadian employers did not offer any recognition for the years of
education and experience the participants had. Although some newcomers will apply for even entry-level positions within their fields, Mon struggled with the idea of practicing anything other than medicine:

But ultrasound can be done even by technician but someone who has gone through their MBBS and all of that, then they shouldn’t make it so tough, with all of these procedures, to come like this…It shouldn’t be like this that if someone is coming from there, having done something, has a degree, then get the degree tested, find out from their university…but in this matter, they are a little stiff.

Nikki had secured several volunteer positions through newcomer placement centres in order to build her Canadian resumes. However, she expressed great frustration at not being hired despite the good work she was doing for the companies. While she was building her resume, the issue remains that she has a family of three children to support, so the pressure to find a paying job has been paramount.

I can do exactly what the other person is doing but I’m not getting hired and I’m working for free where the other person is getting a pay check and money and the other person is able to buy the things that I want to be able to buy for my kids....when I’m working really hard and I’m doing good work and I feel, “Oh my supervisor might get impressed, might decide to hire me” and it doesn’t happen. So all of these things lead to stress and it does give you that negative feeling. It tries to pull you down.

As time passed and many of the newcomers still could not find field-related employment, they resorted to working in “survival jobs” which would provide enough income to continue living in Canada. However, the feelings of frustration and indignation at having to resort to employment that these newcomers were clearly overqualified for, were apparent in the interviews. Shaz’s husband, who is a civil engineer by training, currently works in a factory. Shaz encouraged her husband to continue searching for employment in his field because “I have seen my husband doing a very good job, at a very good place, so that is very distressing to me.” Sara also had a similar experience to Shaz. “My husband was a government officer in Pakistan but in Canada, he worked as a security guard in a factory. Imagine, a government officer working as a security guard.” Even Sara, who has a master’s level education from Pakistan and was pregnant when she arrived in Canada, started to work in a factory in order to secure maternity leave. For Sam, who
is working under management at a computer store, he had to adjust his mentality as he switched from being an owner to becoming an employee.

Sam: I had to completely squash my ego. I mean over there I had my personal business, I had my own employees, and the decisions were mine. And obviously, never in my life had I worked under someone else’s decisions…And coming here, obviously I’m someone else’s employee so I have to stay at my level. I have to control myself a lot…The major difference is that often when I’m on my way home from work, I don’t want to speak to anyone because of this…

For many of the newcomers, there was a stark difference between the life they led back home and the life they were starting to lead in Canada. The most salient difference was the decreased standard of living in Canada. Sam described the loss of status as a reality of immigrating: “The status that we lived over there, obviously we had to leave that status and think about a lot of things. And the children feel these things as well.” The participants were accustomed to a certain life of luxury and privilege with a large house, servants, cooks and drivers. For example, Tashi was not used to living without servants and cooks so living in Canada on her own was a challenge, as she described here, “I didn’t know how to cook. Never having to fend for myself. Never having to do the groceries. Picking and dropping my son from school... I mean like, there were quite a lot of teething issues.” Nikki and Neelo both described the initial days of adjusting to their new lives, especially without any form of personal transportation.

Neelo: Like over there, I never went anywhere by walking. Maybe, just maybe, I might have gone on a bus once or twice. Maybe. And very rarely have I ever travelled alone and when I did have to then there would still be the taxi driver who would pick me up and drop me off. Even that was very rare... it’s such a big deal, walking from here to there.

Nikki: Situation is very stressful you know. Basically in the beginning it was terrible because we were like stripped of our routine or the kind of life we had. As we said earlier, we didn’t have a car here. And then even things we were used to regularly, we were stripped of everything.

For Adi, the biggest adjustment was moving to a smaller home.

It was shocking...when we moved here, we were in Scarborough and we were living in a condominium and we were on the eighth floor and these people were not used to living
anywhere in a condo so that was my first experience as well, and theirs as well. You know, back home, we don’t have that small houses. There are big houses.

The participants clearly experienced difficulty adjusting to their humbler lifestyles as a new way of life.

The newcomers in this study suffered from feelings of sadness, stress, frustration and disappointment due to several settlement hardships. Acculturative stressors such as inaccessible social support systems, and difficulty maintaining cultural values left the participants feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Furthermore, socio-economic stressors affected the participants’ abilities to secure gainful employment and to maintain a lifestyle they were accustomed to from their native homes. The resulting downward social mobility engendered feelings of sadness, disappointment, shame and frustration. In sum, the newcomers in this study faced several challenges in the months after their arrival. However, within those months, the newcomers were able to access several culturally-appropriate resources that were able to meet their needs and helped them maintain their mental health. The following section explores the resources used by the newcomers in this study in further detail.

4.3 Resources accessed by newcomers

The previous section highlighted some of the challenges that newcomers face as they settle into Canada. Life in Canada can be very different from life in their home countries and adjusting to this difference can be quite difficult for newcomers. However, where the newcomers face challenges, they also have resources. The two main sources of support the participants had were social and communal support, and religious support. The social and communal support included the inclusivity of ethnic enclaves, the comfort and motivation from family members and the information and services of community organizations. Religious support was more intrinsic and consisted of a set of positive religious beliefs and help from religious institutions such as mosques and imams.

4.3.1 Social and communal support

The participants cited their social network as a very large source of support and comfort throughout the settling process. At a macro and superficial level, the large South Asian community living in the Greater Toronto Area provided newcomers with the cultural backdrop
that allowed them to feel more integrated and less alien. For the participants who had family in Toronto, support from their extended families reduced feelings of homesickness and anxiety. For those whose families were still in their native countries, friends in Canada and phone calls back home helped these participants get through their days. Also, some of the participants accessed Western social services to help them address difficulties they were experiencing as they settled in Canada. This section of the results will examine in detail how the participants used their social support systems to cope with the psychological stressors of settlement.

4.3.1.1 Ethnic enclaves

Toronto’s immense South Asian population is an attractive factor for many newcomers who are choosing which city they would like to settle in. Adi expressed how Toronto was the most obvious choice for his family because, “…this is a more multicultural city, we would not have gone anywhere else. Toronto is more multicultural, we don’t stand out.” The large South Asian population reassured many of the participants, even as soon as arriving at the Lester B. Pearson airports, as Nikki explained, “We saw a lot of brownies like us so that gave us an immediate feeling of connection, oh like there are people like us all around, so it gave a feeling of comfort also. It was a nice feeling.” Seeing other South Asians in traditional clothes also helped Shaz feel more at home: “…when I first came in, I was standing at the balcony, I saw lots of ladies wearing the same shalwar kameez\(^2\), the same thing, so my husband said, “See? See? There are so many people like you here.” For Uzma, whose English is not very fluent, living in a primarily South Asian environment made communication easier, “And in Mississauga, you see mostly our people, there are more Desi\(^3\) people. Where we now are living, it’s only Hindi and Urdu. No one speaks in English."

On a more micro level, one of the primary sources of comfort and motivation was the participants’ extended families. Given that the extended families were newcomers once themselves, they provided the current newcomers with inspirational stories and hope, as can be seen in the section below.

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\(^2\) *Shalwar kameez* is the traditional dress of Pakistani women.

\(^3\) Desi is a South Asian term that encompasses anything of South Asian descent, e.g. people, food, clothes, etc.
4.3.1.2 Familial support

For all of the participants, their families, both immediate and extended, played a large role in helping the newcomers cope with the feelings of frustration, loneliness, panic and disappointment associated with immigrating to Canada. The families not only provided emotional support to the participants by sharing their own stories of immigration but also provided resources such as information and services. For example, Sam attributed his family’s ability to remain positive throughout the immigrating experience to the presence of his large social network:

...if you look at it weekly, there is always at least one new person who finds out that I have moved here and he calls me and talks me. Us being positive is also attributed to this that, for example, family support...When your friends and family are here, then it is a huge source of support.

Nikki and Shaz felt that having family members who went through similar struggles when they immigrated to Canada offered them inspiration and hope.

Nikki: Yes, relatives do play a big role in it. You do talk to them, they tell us about their struggles, how they faced life when they first immigrated to Canada and they also faced very tough times and basically they have given us the confidence that things do get better after a couple of years.

Shaz: After meeting different people who had already settled here, they really encouraged us a lot, they had given lots of guidance. They have told us that “We have also faced the same problem. Don’t you think after some years you will settle down?” So they are quite encouraging... After looking at their status now, if they are settled then eventually one day we will also be settled too.

For some of the participants, spending time with their families was a very stress-reducing experience and a welcomed distraction. In the following excerpt, Nikki expressed how coming home to her daughter is very relaxing and helps erase the tensions of the day.

The first thing we do is look at our kids. We have a beautiful daughter so we look at her face. I, for me, the most de-stressing thing is just holding her to my chest, you know, that feeling seeps in, you know, that feeling of comfort, basically we like to look at our
children’s faces and spend time with them and share their stories. This is very de-stressing for us.

Mon was also very grateful to have her young children with her as they keep her busy and her mind occupied. She stated the following:

But if I was alone, then I would have felt depressed. It would have been me and the house’s walls. But I had two children, mashAllah\(^4\), and you can see how they are, so all day I am with them and I stay busy.

Najo articulated the importance of his wife and him discussing the positives as well as the negatives: “We sit together, husband and wife, and we talk to each other and what we try to do, there is not just the dark side of things, there are some bright sides of things.” For Sara, her brother played a crucial role in her life during the hardships as a confidante, advisor and caregiver. Her feelings for him are made clear by her following statement: “…my brother really took care of me. I say that Allah sent an angel in the form of my brother to me.”

Not only were families emotionally supportive to the newcomers but they were also resourceful. For some of the participants, family members mentally prepared the newcomers for the challenges that were awaiting them in Canada. For example, Najo’s family in Canada and India cautioned him about the difficulty in finding work in Canada. Consequently, Najo stated that, “once I go to Canada I have the plan A, B, and C, you know, ready, so I should be aware of things, like it is difficult to get jobs, what will I do and have a pretty fool-proof plan.” Sam felt that the mental preparation provided by his Canadian family members was so comprehensive that he and his family were not surprised by many of the challenges they had to face as they settled in Canada. He stated that:

Our family members had mentally prepared us to such an extent, that you can see our attitude. They described every little thing to such an extent that....in fact my brother, before we came, he would call us daily and spend an hour, telling us that we have to bring this, we have to do this, this is how things are, what happens here, here this, this and this happens. So because of that, we did not face any major problem.

\(^4\) MashAllah is an Arabic phrase that literally means “Whatever God wills” and is used to express appreciation of a positive event or state in one’s life by attributing one’s blessings to God’s will.
Once the newcomer participants arrived in Canada, their families continued to provide them with the locations of various services. Tashi and Shaz’s family guided them to services and points of interests, which they found very helpful.

Tashi: Actually, my cousin lived in this condo…so they briefed us, and they showed us the closest supermarket…then they gave us points of interests…And where to go, and where all the restaurants were and what to do. And also where to go for the OHIP and the bank and all those things.

Shaz: And yeh, one of my relative, she had guided me...She had given the contact number of the person and I contacted that person as well. So she was the one who first guided me to this thing [newcomer centre].

Sam felt that an advantage recent newcomers have over newcomers who arrived a few decades ago is that the recent immigrants have a pool of information easily accessible to them through their family and friends, which was not available to past immigrants. He said that, “We didn’t have to create relationships; this is a major factor that I understand. That “Oh that thing? Just take a right from there, take a left, there is a grocery store there, you will find that thing there.” That’s it.” Relationships with family were already established even before some of the participants arrived in Canada and with that was a large source of information.

Family always played a large role in the lives of the participants and they continued to do so in Canada. They provided emotional support by sharing their own experience, knowledge and skills with the newcomers. Consequently, the newcomers perceived their families to be a strong resource that helped them maintain their mental health and a positive outlook.

Another resource used by the participants in this study was community organizations such as newcomer centres and family services. This resource was a more formal form of assistance, mainly used to gain information and services to facilitate finding employment.

4.3.1.3 Community organizations

One of the most popular community organizations used by the participants in this study was newcomer or settlement centres that specialize in immigrant career development. Shaz felt that newcomer centres were very informative and helpful. He stated, “I think this newcomer centre is the most useful because they have really guided me well…..like they have totally told me where
to go and how to get into your field.” Nikki also went to several different immigrant career development centres such as the Mississauga Community Connections and Simfits, which eventually resulted in her securing volunteer positions. In this way Nikki was able to build up her Canadian experience on her resume.

Sara was referred to Catholic Family Services of Toronto by the Children Aid Society after she found herself to be homeless when her brother-in-law would no longer let her and her children live with him. Once she was placed in contact with her social worker, the social worker worked tirelessly to help Sara find a home and employment, and Sara eventually developed a close relationship with this woman.

But she put me into contact with Catholic Family Services. Then they did everything. They told me what to do...My social worker encouraged me a lot. She gave me so much strength. I mean, I used to lie down in her lap and just cry and she would comfort me, like a big sister, not a worker.

Both Shaz and Sara felt a strong connection to their counsellors because they felt that the counsellors provided culturally-competent services. Shaz and her counselor shared a similar background thus, she was able to receive an abundance of relevant information toward securing work in her field.

The second counsellor was a very good one. She had guided me, she was also Pakistani and she had joined this counselling thing so she had also faced all the problems, so she helped me out in that way…She was also a teacher in Pakistan and she had to change her occupation…she had just given me the information just like she was getting the information for herself.

Although Sara’s social worker was not of the same religious background as Sara, she had extensive knowledge of Islam and wove Islamic narratives in their work together, which Sara greatly appreciated.

She would say to be strong, to leave things on God. She is Catholic but she believed on God and she knew that I was Muslim so she knew how to speak to me. I mean she would speak to me in my language, that I liked...she actually had quite bit of knowledge about Islam and she would say, “Look, this is not how it is in your religion.”
Community counselling services proved to be a useful resource to newcomers as they struggled to establish their careers in Canada. Key factor in the efficacy of community counselling services to the newcomer participants were the counsellors’ abilities to provide culturally-competent services, to quickly establish trust and rapport, to be able to identify and meet their needs.

In general, the newcomers in this study found their families and community services to be very effective resources in providing them with comfort, inspiration and information. Family members who were already established in Canada aided in the newcomers’ transitions by guiding them in every way possible and providing moral support in things they could not help with such as finding work. For that, some of the participants turned to newcomer centres to gain information about the employment process in Canada. The most effective services were gained through counsellors who were culturally-competent.

At a more intrinsic level, the participants used their religion and faith to help them cope with the stressors caused by settlement by focusing on the positive messages of Islam and using religious institutions. This spiritual resource is further discussed below.

4.3.2 Religious support

For most of the participants they gained much of their inner strength and resolve through their religion. Islam provided them with a framework of positive beliefs that helped the participants bring meaning to the challenges they faced, as well as positive emotions such as peace, comfort, hope and persistence. Furthermore, some of the participants found comfort at their local mosque or from their imam as the religious institutions were able to provide services that were compatible with the worldviews of the participants.

4.3.2.1 Faith and religiosity

One of the main resources that the participants in this study discussed was their faith in Allah and the practices of Islam. Their faith helped them not only find purpose in their struggles but also find the inner strength and resolve to continue tackling daily issues. Furthermore, praying engendered positive feelings in the participants especially at times of great distress. The participants felt they were the nearest to Allah when they experienced hardship. They stated it was natural for them to turn to Allah when they are distressed:
Sam: And even until now, it’s not like we haven’t had negative experiences in our lives but if we have ever overcome that negative experience it is only and only because of that level of faith we have. And there was no other such thing.

Shaz: I use religion in times of hardship lots of time. I shouldn’t say “lots of times,” I should say “always.”...If I feel depressed, I feel like helpless, I naturally pray.

Uzma: When there are difficulties then obviously you look towards Allah. If any difficulty comes, then you get help from Allah

Najo: Like at time of hardships, I offer prayers, and I ask for help from the Almighty and you know it has helped me.

Mon: Whatever we want, whatever difficulty, then we ask from our Allah. This is my belief and also my husband’s that we will get that thing and that Allah gives it to us.

Not only do the participants turn to Allah for direct assistance but often just the act of praying can bring about positive feelings of tranquility, comfort, resilience and safety. Sam and Mon both looked to God as a source of strength in the face of difficulties and challenges. Sam felt that God was the only reason why they were able to surmount hardships and stated the following: “So thank God...it is just because of God, this I will definitely say, that He gave us the strength so that we can face this positively.” Mon felt that God will only test His followers to the extent that they can bear. She commented that, “We had faith on Allah that He has brought us all the way here, and he can give us strength anywhere.”

Shaz and Uzma found that the act of praying and relying on God brought them feelings of peace and comfort. For example, Shaz stated that:

"I think this is the best way to make yourself calm...Like if you feel like crying, if you feel like helpless, if you pray, if your perform salat, if you start reciting the holy Quran, that will really make you calm...

For Uzma, adhering to religious beliefs helped bring peace into her heart because she felt as though she are doing the right thing: “So if we are holding on to God’s rope then we have a peace... a belief in our hearts that what we are doing, we are doing right and we will be rewarded for it.” Sara also found that Islam helped her find peace as the religion inspired her to release the anger she had towards her husband and forgive him.

"I have forgiven my husband from my heart. I have thrown the matter on Allah. He is sitting up there and He is seeing...This is also in our Islam. That you forgive them."
Forgiveness. You should forgive them. If you forgive him then you are no longer involved. Then it is between Allah and that man.

Furthermore, Sara found comfort knowing that no matter what the circumstances, Allah would provide for her and her children.

...raising them is not for me to do, it is the power from above that will raise them. He can feed an insect from a rock, these are still a human’s offspring. My children, God willing, will not be raised in such dire circumstances. God willing, they will be raised in good circumstances.

Relying on Allah, having faith on Him and worshipping Him all brought peace, comfort and strength to the participants. In addition, the participants’ faith that, ultimately, Allah willed whatever was best for them forced them to look for the positives in the challenges they faced.

For example, just weeks before Sam and Neelo were leaving for Canada, Sam suffered a heart attack. The doctors in Pakistan felt that Sam needed an angioplasty because the lower portion of his heart was blocked but the operation would have delayed their departure by several weeks. Unsure of what to do, Sam and Neelo decided to place their trust in Allah that He would provide them strength and they delayed the operation until they came to Canada. Once they received their OHIP cards in Canada, Sam went for an angiography and the following discovery was made:

Sam: But two or three months ago, I had an angiography, and in the angiography it was discovered that another branch was there, like a natural bypass had been created, and it started to supply the lower portion with blood. So obviously, if I had treated my attack immediately after, I would have for sure had a bypass…Obviously if I had a bypass then there would have been a cut in my chest, and even if that healed, then it wouldn’t be natural…

For Sam and Neelo, this medical miracle cemented their faith that whatever Allah does, He does for the best:

Neelo: This is a huge favour from God that the thing we were not understanding how to proceed, what should we do, what shouldn’t we do...Because at that time, we believed that whatever happened, something good would happen but until it happened, we were completely blind, we didn’t know anything…The doctor was also amazed…because this doesn’t happen normally…Within a year, mashAllah, there was naturally a bypass that was created.
Sara also felt that despite the nightmare she had to live through, in the end things worked out for the best because she is now living peacefully and comfortably with her two children. Sara said, “My faith is that whatever He does, He does it in our best interest. Even we are pricked by a needle, even in this, God has some purpose.” Not only is Sara leading a much better life than before but she is also an inspiration to other South Asian abused women. A few weeks prior to the interview, Sara received a phone call from the wife of her husband’s friend.

Sara: Then one day she called and she said, “I’m calling from a shelter.” I said, “What do you mean?” She has three children. She said, “If you have the strength, then I can do this too. My husband broke my teeth. He broke my nose twice. He beat me so much. He took me to the hospital and told the doctors that I fell in the bathroom. We were married for 12 years.”

The belief that in the end things will work out because of Allah was also prevalent in Shaz’s narrative. She experienced discrimination due to her hijab when she was interviewing for a volunteer position as a teacher at a school. The principal told her that she could have the position but only if she took off her hijab but Shaz decided against it.

But naturally I was a little bit depressed… I said “oh I would have got this thing if...” and then I said...there is nothing after this “if”...So, I said maybe something better is there for me. At this time, this is my faith. This is my belief. Maybe there is something better.

Mon felt that the reason why Allah brings hardships in to people’s lives was in order to remind His followers of His presence.

Mon: This is life. In this, there will be ups and downs. This is the belief, if there is only happiness, or if only good things are happening to us then Allah will bring us down a bit because He needs to make us realize that He is there. He needs to make us aware of His presence.

Although there was a widespread belief that Allah would eventually improve living conditions, the crucial part was to always maintain one’s faith in Allah, no matter how dire the situation became. Adi likened maintaining one’s faith in Allah to maintaining one’s love for their lover despite the ups and downs in a relationship:

It’s like you have a relation with some person...you cannot always expect the good thing in your life. You might have the bad times. You will not do that, when the bad times
come you will lose your faith or you will lose your love... If you do that, then it means that there was nothing there to begin with.

Furthermore, even though the participants believed that Allah is very generous with His blessings and helps His followers, they were all quick to point out that they must do everything in their ability to help themselves first before Allah will help them. It is only once they have put in their best efforts to resolve a situation that they should leave the outcome on Allah’s will. Sam and Neelo were very adamant about taking matters into their own hands, as can be seen by the following quote:

Sam: It’s not about leaving things up to God. Never. We never said, at any stage, that we have left things up to God.

Neelo: Because the problem is, that even God has said that your efforts should be full. It’s not like God will give me food and drink and I don’t have to do anything. So that thing does not exist. You should try your best and then you will receive whatever you deserve from Allah.

Uzma felt the same way as Sam and Neelo. In addition to praying and asking Allah for help, she felt that it was important to seek outside resources as well.

Uzma: Yes, look, if you talk about me, I will say that if there is a problem, I will definitely ask for help from Allah. But Allah does not say that you just sit and wait on your prayer mat and the solution will come from above. It’s not like that. If you have some problem, you have to go for help.

In Sara’s case, she took very bold action by pressing criminal charges on her husband. As a devout Muslim, she believed in the sanctity of marriage yet at the same time could not expect Allah to fix her marriage for her. She felt the need to take matters into her own hands.

After being so distressed for 8-9 years, then I took this step because Allah does not support someone until that person has their own courage. And naturally, these steps kept coming before me and I kept climbing them.

Once Sara took the first step of trying to distance herself from her husband, she found that all other events that occurred seemed to be trying to get her to safety, away from her abusive relationship.
In summary, religion and faith played a large role in the lives of most participants. They felt that their relationship with Allah provided them with the psychological ease they needed in order to face the challenges in their lives. Belief in divine providence and divine will allowed the participants to remain positive and optimistic that their circumstances would eventually improve, as long they would continue to have faith and try their best. For some of the participants, in addition to the personal prayer and worship, they were also involved in their local mosques. The role of the mosques and imams in the lives of the newcomers is discussed in the following section.

4.3.2.2 Mosques and imams

According to the literature, many newcomers find that their religious communities and clergy play a large role in helping them settle into Canada as they provide social contacts, emotional and spiritual support and cultural continuity (Hirscham, 2004). Although many of the participants in this study listed their faith as being a strong contributor to their mental health, most of the participants were not active attendees of a mosque. The most common reason given was that the mosque was geographically difficult to access.

Nevertheless, many of the participants were still aware of some community services offered at the mosque such as ESL classes, religious classes and activities for youth and children. In fact, involving the children and youth in the mosque and Islam was of prime important to the participants with children. For example, among all the negative media representation of Islam, Najo appreciated his children being taught about the true nature of their religion.

I take my children [to the mosque] also, if they are off or they don’t have any school...Especially for the younger generation, they try to teach what true Islam is. It’s not what you see all around. So I find that quite true and quite necessary.

For Neelo, it was so important to her that her sons attend Friday prayers\(^5\) that she did not even mind if the children had to take time off from school.

I feel that if we had a mosque that was even a little bit closer, then my children would surely go to the mosque, which they don’t right now. They could even take some time off from school, that would not be that much of a problem.

\(^5\) In general, Muslims, and especially men, are encouraged to pray in congregation whenever they can. However, in the Qu’ran, the men are strictly instructed that they must pray in congregation for the afternoon prayers on Friday.
Sara was the only participant who had her children enrolled in the Sunday school program at her local mosque. She stated the following about the advantages of religious instruction for her children:

Every Sunday, at prayer time, the children are addressed on how they have to save themselves, either from the outside environment or something like this…They tell the children what is halal and what is haram and what is the difference between these things. And the children know more than us. I’ll drink while standing up and they’ll drink while sitting down\textsuperscript{6}. There is a difference…

Sara was the only participant who was an active participant in her local mosque. She was also the only participant who did not know anyone else in Toronto other than her children and was trying to navigate serious domestic issues. Sara reported that she has received a lot of emotional, financial and material support from the community at the mosque:

Our Islamic centre here, they offer a food bank for six months to single parents, single mothers…They have waived the children’s fees…. I speak to them and they offer a lot of support…For example, for Eid, they send clothes for myself, for the children, they send sweets, they make a whole packet…Eid has come to my home…So this is a very big support for me. A very big support from the community.

In addition to receiving resources from the mosque, Sara also spoke to the imam about the problems she was experiencing with her husband. Her primary purpose in consulting with the imam was to confirm that her actions were in accordance with the Islamic Shari’ah law.

I spoke to the imam. I told him the whole situation. According to the Shari’ah, what can I do? He said, according to Shari’ah… “What you are saying is absolutely right. You are absolutely right. Give me his number. I want to speak to him.”

The imam took an active role in attempting to reconcile the family by trying unsuccessfully to get in touch with Sara’s husband in Pakistan. Although he was unable to reconcile the couple, Sara appreciates having him in her sons’ life as a positive male role model: “The imam teaches the children in a very nice way.”

\textsuperscript{6} In Islam, Muslims are encouraged to sit while drinking as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did.
Najjo also appreciated the words of the imam at his mosque as the imam was a gifted orator and apt at comforting the newcomers in his congregations during the Friday sermons.

Najo:…like the priest gives us a pretty good idea about the situation out here and they always motivate us and they have always told us, it is a pretty good country, and we should love our country and if we work hard, we can achieve. So hearing such things from the head of the community, it is very encouraging and motivating.

Sara felt that the Friday sermons should be used to address key social issues in the community, such as domestic abuse.

Our women need a lot of help. How do we counsel them? How do we tell them not to tolerate abuse? It’s against our religion. And I think more than our women, our men need counselling. We need to raise our sons so that they do housework too. If our Prophet swept his house then who are we? Where did all of these examples go? This Islamic Centres should talk about this in their Friday sermons.

It is interesting to note that in contrast to Sara’s experience, Sam and Neelo, who have an extensive social network in Toronto, felt that imams played a minimal role in the lives of the Muslim congregation. Sam felt that the role of the imam was limited to that of leading prayers and providing information on the constitution of Islam, or the Shari’ah law, “We can only absorb them to this extent that they deliver Islamic constitution.” They felt that pastoral counselling was not needed by the Muslim community because Muslims prefer to solve their problems within their families so there is no need for a third person to become involved.

Sam: You can easily discuss your problem with your mother. My children can easily discuss their problems with me. This is for any type of problem…We can discuss it very easily and nicely amongst ourselves.

Even for problems that may be of religious nature, Neelo still did not see the need to consult an imam as the only way a Muslim can gain Allah’s forgiveness is to ask Allah directly. The imam cannot play the role of intermediary as priests do in Catholicism.

Neelo: The other thing is that they [Christians] feel that if there is any negativity, then they will go say it in the box to the father and the father solved it or else if there is a problem then they will absolve it and balance it. But we don’t have that concept…With us, if you have made a mistake then you have to talk to your God and there is nothing in
between…He [the imam] can’t solve it, he can’t forgive us. Then why should we discuss it with him? There is no reason.

The role of the mosques and the imams varied between participants. In general, it was reported that currently, the role of Islamic institutions was minimal. For most of the participants, the mosque was a place to pray in congregation and to pass on religious values to the children. However, for Sara the mosque and imam played a larger role in her life because they actively helped her when she was experiencing financial and emotional difficulties as she tried to settle by herself in Canada with her two children. Furthermore, Sara saw the imam as a community leader who could address the social ills of the Muslim community such as domestic abuse. Sam and Neelo, on the other hand, felt that the primary responsibilities of the imam were to lead the prayer and to be a consultant for religious affairs. Unlike the participants’ views on their personal faith, their views on the mosques differed and depended on their personal experiences with these institutions.

Although newcomers to Canada face many difficulties as they settle into their new host country, they also possess a number of resources to help them manage those difficulties. Among the most significant resources used by the newcomers in this study were their families. The families of the participants provided motivation, comfort and information as many of the extended family members had gone through similar experiences when they first immigrated to Canada. In addition to families, some of the participants accessed community resources such as settlement agencies to help them develop their professional careers. In this case, cultural competency of the counselors at these centres was a crucial component of client satisfaction. Another large resource for the participants in this study was their faith. They stated that their faith in God’s providence and Islam’s emphasis on remaining optimistic helped them reframe negative events so that they could overcome challenges and continue to persevere. In the end, despite the challenges, the participants were still able to see their immigrating experience as a positive experience and were able to maintain their mental health using the resources that were the most appropriate for their needs. The participants’ positive outlook is further explored in the next section.

4.4 Maintaining a positive outlook

By using resources such as faith and family the participants in this study were able to maintain their mental health without the help of professional mental health service providers. They were
able to recount many positive aspects about their immigrating experience that made their decision to move worthwhile.

4.4.1 Benefits of living in Canada

Despite the several challenges the participants were experiencing, they all agreed that Canada was a wonderful country to live in. The number one advantage of living in Canada was security. Because most of the participants came from Pakistan, a country with a volatile environment, the participants truly cherished the simple ability to walk outside at night and still be safe. For example, Shaz had the following to say about the security in Canada: “Anytime we can go out, even at night, even in the middle of the night, we can go out without thinking about anything.” Uzma provided a profound contrast between safety in Canada and Pakistan as she expressed in the following quote: “Most importantly, there is no security problem. Like you don’t have to be afraid that I am wearing so much jewellery, someone will take me away. There is this problem in Karachi.”

Furthermore, many of them appreciated the liberal and accepting values propagated by the Canadian government. For Sara, the idea of equality is the most precious gift Canada has given her. She truly was thankful for all the help the Canadian government provided her as she struggled to provide housing and food for her children.

If I say I have had really bad experiences, then this is not right either. This government has given me so much relief. They never asked on any paper what my religion is. They didn’t ask anything on any paper. They just checked whether I was eligible or not. Until I was with my husband, I had different experiences…Now I am much, much better.

In addition to equality, all of the participants felt that they were free to practice their religion and culture however they wished. Shaz expressed how the freedom to practice religion and express their culture to the degree that one wishes made Canada an attractive home for its immigrants.

And as I can see, Canada is a very open country and they have welcomed everyone…So you can easily practice religion, you can easily practice even nationality, so I don’t think there will be problem with that one. This is the freedom which is very good, which has made the people stay here for such a long time.
Uzma has not encountered many problems related to wearing her hijab. She felt comfortable practicing her faith as she wanted, which can be seen by her following statement: “I never had a problem here that if I wear my scarf, that someone will say something…As far as religion goes, if I have my faith, then no one stopped me.”

Not only do the participants feel they have the freedom to practice their religion as they wish but a few of the participants like Shaz, Sam and Adi, felt that their religious faith has strengthened. For Shaz, living in a society where Islam is no longer the dominant religion forced her to seriously consider why she practiced her religion in the way that she did. This contemplation helped her strengthen her resolve to be religious.

No, I think my faith has a little bit strengthened up more because I faced a couple of things which, then I realized that, “Why am I doing this?...Do you have to show it to the people or do you have to show it to God, to Allah?...It’s alright, whatever I believe is best.

Sam and Adi also felt that their faith has been strengthened and clarified, as can be seen by their following statements:

Sam: I’m seeing a religious improvement here.
Adi: Right now, it’s been refined. My belief has been refined. There are so many good things.

Furthermore, for Sam and Adi, they have developed a more humanistic view of Islam and what it means to be Muslim. This has been facilitated by increased interactions with individuals of different faiths and realizing that many of them still share the same values as Muslims. For example, Sam had the following to say on the matter:

And the basic teachings, that in fact we never even had to think about over there…he is Christian, he is Buddhist, he is Jewish, whatever, he is XYZ, so when we talk to them, it’s not like we have bad feelings towards them in our heart, or they are not getting bad feelings from our words so that they can think that our religion is bad…

Beyond spiritual growth, for many of the female participants, Canada gave them an inadvertent opportunity to grow and seek independence. Tashi, who came from a society with many social obligations and restrictions, felt that she became an empowered woman in Canada. She never would have believed that she would be able to move abroad and settle in a new country by
herself. She felt liberated from the social niceties of Pakistan and felt that she could finally be herself.

I think I have gotten used to living here. It’s easier. In a lot of ways. It just makes you more independent and it’s easier…I feel I am more independent here. I love my independence. I found this late. It kind of changed me. I think I am a changed person…I just think differently because I’m more empowered now.

Nikki too felt more empowered. While she was living in India and Oman, due to family obligations, she was unable to pursue a professional career. However, due to her current circumstances and the difficulty her husband is having in securing a residency, Nikki had to take an active role in developing herself professionally.

…it would have been a problem for me to maintain life in Oman so I decided not to work and my kids were small so I lost out on a lot of my professional life. But when I came here, I gained all that in a short span of time. I gained a lot of experience professionally. I feel now I am ready to get a good job and it will happen. So this was a very positive thing for me.

With the help of resources both in heaven and on earth, the participants in this study were still able to see the positive things Canada had to offer to its immigrants. Having security, equality and liberty within the structure of the Canadian government held great significance to the immigrants. Furthermore, immigrating to Canada allowed some of the women to grow both personally and professionally, an opportunity they never had in their home countries.
Chapter 5
Discussion

This study proposed to examine the resources used by South Asian Muslim newcomers who were facing numerous challenges while trying to settle in Canada. The study found that while the participants experienced acculturative and socio-economic stressors, they also used several resources such as religious, social, and institutional support to help them cope with the stressors. The participants found that these resources adequately met their mental health needs and thus were able to settle in Canada healthily without the help of professional mental health service providers. This discussion section seeks to discuss the results in a holistic manner, examining how the participants’ expectations and perception of challenges and resources mediated their experience of settling in Canada. In the end, a model will be presented to represent the immigrating progress the newcomers, in this study, went through.

5.1 Settlement challenges and resources accessed by newcomers in the settling process

The participants in this study decided to immigrate to Canada for various reasons. The three most commonly cited reasons were to escape the political and economic instability of their native countries, to offer their children a better future, and to seek an improved standard of living for themselves. As immigrants, these individuals made a conscious, free decision to leave behind their lives in order to gain a better life in Canada. As such, their goals for immigrating to Canada were a stable life and upward social mobility. However, there were differences in the participants’ expectations of how they would achieve those goals and the differences depended on the amount of information regarding settlement in Canada they possessed before immigrating. For example, Sam and Neelo had a number of family members who had recently emigrated from Pakistan to Toronto. These family members had gone through many hardships before obtaining their current, successful status and they spared Sam and Neelo no details regarding the difficulties of immigrating to Canada. Sam and Neelo had every aspect of settlement described to them from the weather to the job market. As such, Sam and Neelo were very well prepared, both financially and mentally, for their immigration. Knowing the difficulty in finding work, Sam arranged to work at his friend’s computer store before he left Karachi. With employment secured in an area that was related to Sam’s professional background, a large social network and a strong
faith system, Sam and Neelo’s family was able to approach their settling experience in a relatively positive manner. On the other hand, Najo and Nikki struggled greatly for the past year and a half that they have been living in Canada. They too have a large social support in Canada and had been strongly cautioned about the difficulty of medical professionals securing work in Canada. However, Najo’s assumption was that the most difficult part would be passing the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (M.C.C.E.E.) and that once this was cleared, finding work would be manageable, as the shortage of family physicians in Canada was a well-known fact. In the meantime, he had been told by relatives that finding work in allied medical fields would be fairly simple so he could still work as he waited to procure his Canadian medical licence. Given these expectations, it is not surprising that after a year and a half of passing the M.C.C.E.E exams, Najo was extremely frustrated that he was still unemployed and unable to provide for his family. He was unaware of the stringent, ambiguous requirements to secure a residency position nor of the difficulty an immigrant encounters in applying for any employment beyond labour work. His wife, Nikki, was experiencing similar frustration as she too has been certified in her field and has procured Canadian work experience through volunteering and internships yet was still unable to find work in her field. With both partners unemployed and a family of three children to provide for, Najo and Nikki were under considerable strain due to their immigration.

The difference in knowledge affected the expectations the participants had, which in return affected how the participants perceived the challenges they faced as they settled in Canada. Sam and Neelo saw the challenges as part of a process whereas Najo and Nikki saw the challenges as unfair and unexpected. George and Chaze (2009) highlighted the need for accurate information about the immigration process prior to immigrating. In this study, the newcomers that were mentally prepared beforehand were more likely to see the settlement difficulties as simply part of the process and a means to an end. Given the positive impact on pre-immigration information, a recommendation to immigration centres in other countries is to have a “buddy” system where potential immigrants can be paired with South Asians already settled in Canada (Furukawa, Sarasson & Sarasson, 1998, as cited in Ahmad, Shik, Vanza, Cheung, George, & Stewart, 2005). This could be an especially valuable resource to those who do not have any family or friends in Canada.
The participants listed several other challenges to the process of settling in Canada. Generally there were two kinds of stressors: acculturative and socio-economic. Acculturative stressors included the inaccessibility of social support systems and difficulty in transmitting cultural values. Socio-economic stressors included career development challenges and downward social mobility. All stressors placed considerable strain on the newcomers in this study.

Although most of the participants had large social networks established upon their arrival in Canada, there were four participants who came to Toronto without knowing anyone. For these four participants the shift from being surrounded by family and friends to being isolated and alone was a difficult one. The lack of friends and family not only meant a less active social life, but more importantly it meant no emotional support in Canada. Loss of social support systems has been shown to be a contributor to feelings of depression and stress in Asian newcomers (Khan, 2005; Ahmad et al., 2005). Newcomers without social support systems in Canada lose rich sources of emotional support while gaining the emotional burdens of immigrating to a new and different country.

Furthermore, when these participants chose to move to Toronto because they knew that it had a large South Asian population, they expected that South Asians in Canada would be as warm and welcoming as South Asians in Pakistan. However, the participants’ attempts to build a social circle in Toronto proved difficult as the fast-paced, materialistic and individualistic lifestyle of Canada prevented many South Asians from having time, or making time, to establish relationships with others. Khan (2005) found similar results in her study of Pakistani women. The participants in that study reported that the South Asian community members behaved like strangers and were not helpful (Khan, 2005).

In order to fill the void of family and friends, these participants would contact family back home very frequently through telephone and the internet. For example, as Sara struggled to live with her abusive husband and in-laws, she increasingly sought the advice of her older brother who lived in the United States. Even from afar, Sara’s brother continued to play a pivotal role in Sara’s life, providing her advice and comfort when she needed it. He even saved her life when she called him with suicidal ideations due to her desperate situation. Sara recounted the sheer desolation she felt as the prospect of becoming homeless with two young children loomed over her. The only person she felt she could turn to was her brother, who in turn, encouraged her to
pray and place her faith in God. His encouraging words instilled hope in Sara and she decided that she would continue to live for her children.

Besides providing emotional and moral support, social networks also provided a cultural environment that facilitated the maintenance and transmission of cultural and religious values in newcomer families. Most of the participants chose to live in an area where there was a large South Asian community already established. Being surrounded by ethnically similar individuals recreated the social and cultural environment of their native countries and eased feelings of isolation and otherness. However, research on ethnic enclaves and acculturation of immigrants has found that living in an ethnic enclave can slow the acculturation process because the immigrants remain in their isolated communities and do not interact with the greater Canadian society (Qadeer, 2003). For example, Uzma reported that she felt that her English was not fluent enough to secure her employment. She tried taking online English classes but found them ineffective because she felt that one learns a language through practicing. However, her current physical and social environment is completely Pakistani, giving her no opportunity to practice her English, thus making it difficult for her to acculturate into Canadian culture and to secure employment.

Despite the impediment on the acculturation process, living within an ethnic enclave also had advantages for the parents in this study as their children were socializing mainly with South Asian children and thus were not experiencing a clash of cultural and religious values to any alarming degree. For example, the school classes of Sam and Neelo’s children are predominantly Muslim so although Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha are not official holidays in the school calendar, tests and lessons were postponed as more than half of the school was absent.

Furthermore, youth programs at the local mosques also provided Muslim children and adolescents with the religious training they needed. In the native countries of the participants, the transmission of religious and cultural values was not difficult for two main reasons: first, because the majority culture was the same as that of the participants and second, religion was taught in schools or at homes by scholars. Children learned how to read the Arabic Qu’ran not from their parents but from religious men who would be paid to teach the children. Similarly, the tenets of

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7 Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha are religious Muslim holidays.
Islam were taught in school as part of the curriculum. In addition, family and friends who would have a hand in the upbringing of the children within a family or neighbourhood would also share the responsibility of disciplining and teaching the children. Beyond modelling desired behaviours for their children, parents played a small role in transmitting religious values.

However, in Canada, where the majority culture is based on a secular, individualistic society, religious and cultural education is not included within the public schools’ curriculum. Often children of newcomers, and newcomers themselves, are caught in a clash of cultures where the majority culture promotes ideas and philosophies that go against many South Asian and Muslim values. Ethnic enclaves in Toronto help newcomers retain the resources of family, friends and institutionalized teaching in transmitting and maintaining cultural values in the new generations. Sara, who did not have a large social circle in Canada, relied heavily on her local mosque to religiously guide her children. She enrolled both her sons in Sunday school and hoped that the religious education would protect the children from losing their values within a society that differs so greatly from their own. Uzma and Mon also believed that staying close to Islam was an effective way of maintaining their and their children’s values. They felt that as long as they could inculcate a strong sense of religious faith in the children from a young age then the children would not face much difficulty in staying true to their roots.

In addition to acculturative stressors, the newcomers in this study also suffered from socio-economic stressors. The socio-economic stressors, which included career development challenges and downward social mobility, caused the most distress and hardship for the participants. The inability to find work, and the resulting loss in income, produced great strain and frustration as the participants tried multiple avenues to secure employment. In a study conducted by Statistics Canada, immigrants who had been living in Canada for at least four years reported that finding employment that matched their credentials was the most difficult part of immigrating (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007).

For some of the participants, their primary resources for their career development issues were settlement centres that specialized in retraining immigrants. The counsellors at these centres were key figures at helping the participants understand the demands of the Canadian job market and to help them become more attractive candidates for work. However, after a certain time of participating in workshops and courses, Shaz, Najjo and Nikki were frustrated at the lack of
results. Furthermore, the participants felt they had saturated whatever services these centres had to offer because they were no longer learning anything new. This alarmed them as they assumed that once they went through these centres, they would be able to find work. In the end, at least for Najjo and Nikki, a sad possibility may be that they have to work in labour jobs in order to continue living in Canada. Shaz’s husband already is working in a factory and Sara had her own bout of factory work when she first arrived to Canada. It has been found that only 24% of newcomers in Canada are employed in jobs that matched their skills compared to 62% of native-born Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2010). The main reasons sited for the difficulty was lack of Canadian experience and lack of recognition of foreign credentials. Without relevant experience, most newcomers stand a small chance in procuring employment in their field and many have to resort to labour jobs in order to support their families (Galarneau & Morisette, 2004). This type of underemployment can result in a salary that is 40% less than a skills-matched employment (Galarneau & Morisette, 2004). The consequence of the salary cut is a sharp decrease in the living standards of newcomers.

Beyond the financial losses due to unemployment and underemployment, there is a greater loss of identity and self-value in unemployed and underemployed immigrants (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Naidoo, 1992). Some of the participants in this study came to Canada with a sense of entitlement due to their professions, social class and family background. In a society that has a deep history with a social hierarchy such as the Hindu and Muslim caste system, there are clear demarcations how individuals from certain classes are treated by others. The deferential treatment that the newcomers were habituated to in their home countries was replaced with a perception of disdainful treatment by Canadian employers and financial institutions. Adi found it insulting that he had to go through the same process to procure a mortgage as a newcomer who did not have his professional standings.

Furthermore, having all previous academic and professional experience rendered meaningless by Canadian employers challenged the significance of one’s work thus far. The participants felt a loss of self-worth as they were continuously rejected by employers. It is this psychological loss that engendered feelings of stress, depression and regret at choosing to immigrate that could have jeopardized the mental health of the participants. As the participants struggled with finding employment and adjusting to a humbler lifestyle, family in Canada was a precious source of emotional support for the participants in this. Whether it was their immediate or extended family,
the participants felt as though their family would provide the encouragement and comfort they needed in the face of hardships. Of particular assistance were the shared lived experiences the newcomers had with their family members who once were newcomers themselves. Realizing they had gone through the same challenges but succeeded in the end provided the participants in this study with much needed hope and motivation. In their study of South Asian women, George and Chaze’s (2009) participants stated that family members were more accessible and relevant because the information they provided was individually tailored to the needs of the individual. For this reason, many newcomers trusted their social support systems blindly and would rather consult family than professional mainstream services offered to immigrants (George & Chaze, 2009). This was reflected in this study as all the participants reported that in times of distress they would rather speak to their family members than to a professional counsellor. Kobeisy (2004) highlighted a common perception that Muslims have towards mainstream counselling: his participants felt that counselling was only for individuals who did not have family to rely on.

Remarkably, despite the challenges they faced, the participants in this study were in seemingly good mental health. They were able to draw upon resources that provided the emotional and psychological support they required in order to push through the hardships. As previously mentioned, in the case of socio-economic stressors, family members played a pivotal role in providing motivation and comfort to the participants. Sharing their own experiences, the family members were able to instil hope in the participants that if they were persistent, conditions would improve, making their immigration successful.

Throughout their hardships, including socio-economic struggles, religious faith proved to be a particularly effective resource for engendering positive feelings. All of the participants identified themselves as Muslims but their levels of religious observance greatly varied from those who practiced many of the Islamic tenets to those who had a more spiritual, personal interpretation of Islam. Regardless of their religiosity, the role of religion became much more prominent for them when they experienced hardship. The participants felt that when they were faced with difficulties in their life, they would turn to Allah and Islam. Pargament and Hahn (1986) reported that regardless of an individual’s daily levels of religiosity, many people turn to religion more often in times of crisis than in times of daily frustrations.
Participants would connect with their religious beliefs in many ways, such as performing salat\(^8\), making private supplications or simply reflecting on Allah’s presence. Practicing their faith helped the participants achieve feelings of comfort and peace when they were feeling greatly stressed and discouraged. For example, when Sara was extremely worried about how she would provide for herself and her children in an unfamiliar and foreign country, the belief that Allah would ultimately provide for her family strengthened and comforted her greatly. Personal prayer can be seen as a direct method of communicating with the divine (Rezaei, Adib-Hajbaghery, Seyedfatemi & Hoseini, 2008) and therefore enlisting the help of the one Being who controls all things can comfort individuals in distress. Maltby, Lewis and Day (1999) found in their study of British students that there was a negative correlation between performing personal prayer and the presentation of symptoms of depression and anxiety as well as a positive correlation between personal prayer and self-esteem. These findings are well reflected within the narratives of the participants for this study.

Many of the participants believed that all hardships in life served some greater purpose as they believed that Allah has a Divine plan. This belief promoted resilience, persistence and hope since the participants felt that the difficulties they were currently experiencing had meaning. Some participants felt that what they currently perceived as challenges were actually blessings, believing they would experience something even better in the future. After losing a volunteer position because of her hijab, Shaz reinterpreted the episode with the belief that she did not secure that position because she was destined for something better. In this way, she was able to cope with her disappointment and anger from losing the position by focusing her energies on her continued job search.

The participants in this study reflected a key concept in Islam which states that Allah is all-knowing and He knows what is best for His followers. Therefore, Muslims tend to look for the benefit in every situation with the belief that if they are faithful Muslims, everything that occurs in their lives will benefit them either in this life or the hereafter (Hamdan, 2008). In a famous

\(^8\) Salat is a ritualized form of prayer in Islam. Muslims are required to perform salat five times a day at prescribed times of the day. However, one can choose to perform non-obligatory salat at any point if they feel the need to do so.
hadith⁹ reported by Sahih Bukhari, it is believed that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that.” (University of Southern California-Muslim Student Association [USC-MSA], n.d.a, vol. 7, book 70, #545, as cited in Hamdan, 2008). In this manner, maintaining an optimistic attitude even in difficult times is an important part of maintaining one’s Islamic faith. It shows that one has faith in Allah and his Providence.

Trusting Allah or having faith was a prominent theme throughout many of the participants’ narratives as they described what helped them cope with their first few months in Canada. A deeply rooted belief that, ultimately, Allah would take care of them helped the participants continue to persevere. Within Islam, Muslims are guaranteed salvation and assistance as long as they place their whole trust in Allah; that He will deliver them from their hardships: “And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]” (Qu’ran 3:159). Generally, most of the participants were comforted that eventually Allah would guide them out of their difficulty because the Qu’ran states: “So verily, with the hardship, there is ease (relief).” (Qu’ran, 94:5). In this way, no matter what the challenge was, the participants always had hope that conditions would eventually improve.

Despite the importance of having faith in Allah and submitting to His will, Islam is still an empowering religion as it emphasizes human effort in addition to having faith in Allah. In chapter 13, verse 11 of the Qu’ran, it is written, “Verily, Allah does not change a people’s condition until they change what is in themselves,” implying that Allah requires His people to try to change their conditions themselves first before Allah will intercede on their behalf. When faced with a challenge, the participants would try their best to resolve it themselves then accept whatever outcome Allah has decreed for them, feeling that whatever Allah has planned would ultimately be for the best. This prevented the participants from feeling helpless and powerless in the circumstances in their life. For example, Uzma wanted to start working in a few months, when her infant son was a bit older. She was aware that she faced several barriers, the most

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⁹ The practices of Islam are based on three sources: the Qu’ran, which is believed to be the word of God, the hadiths, which are believed to be reports of the sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad, and the Shari’ah, a body of Islamic laws that is based on the Qu’ran and hadiths.
prominent being language barriers. Uzma is not fluent in English and, thus, does not feel comfortable conversing in English. As she aptly stated, she does not expect English fluency to descend upon her from Allah just by her prayers; she will have to take English as a Second Language courses and practice her English. However, if after becoming fluent in English she is still unable to find work, then she would appeal to Allah for assistance.

Pargament, Kennell, Hathaway, Grevengoed, Newman and Jones (1988) described three styles of religious coping: self-directing, deferring and collaborative. Self-directing coping is the belief that although God placed humans on Earth, God is more of an observer of the world and it is up to the humans to guide their lives and make the right decisions. Coping through deferring is at the opposite end of the spectrum where the belief is that humans have no agency and that everything is preordained by God. Collaborative coping is in between these two coping styles: the belief is that humans work with God in order to achieve their goals. All of the participants in this study possessed a collaborative coping style. Although they felt that God did have control over the outcome of situations, it was still important for them to do their part and try their best to achieve the best outcome possible. In this manner, the participants had a healthy sense of agency while still being able to accept whatever outcome occurs as the work of God. Pargament et al. (1988) found that the collaborative coping style was associated with greater sense of personal control and higher self-esteem, making it an effective coping style in many situations.

Interestingly, despite the participants’ strong connections to Islam and their faith, most participants reported that they did not feel a very strong connection to the mosque or the imam. These findings are in contrast to several studies that have reported a large role of religious institutions in the lives of newcom ers (Hirscham, 2004; George & Chaze, 2009; Kim, 2006). It has been reported that mosques and imams can provide culturally-appropriate mental health services and social support (Ali et al., 2005). Religious institutions can be seen as a place the newcomer can immerse themselves in their native culture, helping them reconnect with their roots and feeling less alien in North American society (Hirscham, 2004). However, for many of the participants, their source of South Asian culture and social support was not the mosque but, rather, their family and friends. Furthermore, all the participants felt that the mosque was too far from their home for them to regularly attend the prayers. In South Asia, these participants would find a mosque within every few blocks, which facilitated partaking in prayers, especially Friday afternoon prayers which require the men to pray in congregation. In Canada, however, taking
time off from work on Friday to pray was virtually impossible for the men in this study. The women are not required to pray in congregation so they were not as greatly affected by the change in accessibility.

Muslims who are not as active in the mosque may place more importance on personal prayer and see faith as an intimate matter between the individual and God (Hadad & Lummis, 1987). In this case, the mosque and the imam could simply be perceived as the house and keeper of worship playing more minimal roles in the personal life of that Muslim (Hadad & Lummis, 1987). Many of the participants in this study viewed the mosque as a place to reaffirm their cultural and religious identity, not so much as a place for spiritual growth. In the same vein, Hadad and Lummis (1987) found that mosque participation often increased as children of the congregants became older and the parents wanted to preserve the religious and cultural values of their adolescents. In fact, all of the parents in this study felt that teaching the children about Islam would be the best way to preserve their values in the “corrupting” Canadian culture. Neelo was quite distressed that the closest mosque to their home was too far for her children to travel to unaccompanied on Friday afternoons. She felt that the mosques should be more accessible to individuals who did not own their own personal transportation.

The role of the imam was even less significant in the lives of these participants. Some of the participants saw the imam only as a religious scholar who can help his congregation if they have religious issues. Given that most of the participants felt that their greatest challenges were due to acculturation and immigration rather than religion, they did not see the imam as a counsellor or confidante for normative or personal stress. The participants felt that their families and personal faith practices were better suited coping systems for the type of problems they were currently experiencing. In a study on Muslims’ attitude towards counselling, Khan (2006) found that about forty-five percent of the Muslim participants, mostly of South Asian and Arab nationality, never sought comfort or counsel from the imam.

Sara, who was the only participant who consulted the imam about a personal issue, explained that she was primarily looking for religious validation of her actions. However, the imam went beyond just informing Sara of the religiously recommended course of action by actively trying to reconcile the family by trying to counsel Sara’s husband. Although congregants may consult imams in what seems to them on religious matters, some imams may feel the responsibility as a
community leader to take a more active role in rectifying the situation. In this case, knowledge of local community service organizations is indispensable. For example, if Sara had went to the imam while she was still with her husband, in order to truly help Sara exit the abusive relationship the imam would need to know about local women’s shelters where Sara could seek refuge and social workers who could help Sara cope with the traumatic effects of domestic abuse. As it can be seen, although congregants may see imams as only religious consultants, after hearing the serious nature of their congregants’ problems, the imams may feel that more than just religious advice is required. It is at this point where knowledge of Canadian social service organizations would be crucial to the imam. This example clearly illustrates the need for the “door to swing both ways;” for religious counsel and Canadian social services to be aware of each others’ resources and services. Imam Suhaib Webb, a prominent American imam in California, has repeatedly emphasized the need for Muslims who are counsellors or social workers to collaborate with the mosques. In his words, he stated that “Mosques are not looking for imams, they are looking for Superman. We are not trained to deal with abuse, substance abuse or mental illness. We need help.” (Webb, 2009).

Most of the participants reported that their personal faith and family were sufficient at providing them with the resources needed to help them maintain their mental health in their current circumstances, such that they did not even have a strong need for the mosque and imams. Generally, the participants felt that the mosques were simply a place to pray and possibly a place to educate their children about their religious values. However, for one of the participants Sara, the mosque played a more pivotal role in her life. Sara’s different experience with the mosque could be due to the fact that she was facing a very serious domestic issue without any family in Toronto. Her account highlights that mosques and imams are still used, to an extent, by Muslim newcomers to help them cope with their problems and thus mosques may need support from mental health professionals.

It should be noted that throughout Sara’s trials and tribulations, she never felt the need to explicitly seek professional psychotherapy. In fact, none of the participants reported feeling a need for professional mental health help to help them cope with the challenges of settling in a new country. Despite the difficult experiences, the participants felt that they were able to manage their hardships with the resources that they felt were most appropriate such as their faith and their families. The participants were still able to highlight the positive parts of their immigrating
experience such as living in a safe environment, having equality and freedom, and personal growth. However, their optimism and positive attitude could also be a result of a response bias. After discussing all the problems they have experienced, the participants may have tried to highlight the positives in order to make it seem that conditions eventually improved and that they are now perfectly fine in order to save face.

5.2 A model of challenges and resources experienced by South Asian Muslim newcomers

The interviews in this study were analyzed using Grounded Theory. The basis of this methodology is to repeatedly review the transcripts of the interview in order to find themes that carry through all the interviews and to weave those themes into a model or theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the case of this study a model was created in order to visualize how South Asian Muslim newcomers access resources in the face of challenges due to immigration and settlement (see Figure 1). The model presents a process that leads newcomers from immigration to wellbeing.

The experience of immigrating is initially informed by the expectations the newcomers had of the immigrating experience prior to the actual immigration. More specifically, newcomers who had a realistic idea of immigration prior to immigration were less surprised by the challenges related to settlement whereas those who did not possess adequate information perceived the challenges in a more negative manner. As the participants settled in Canada, they each experienced several stressors, including acculturative and socio-economic stressors. These stressors caused psychological distress in the form of sadness, anxiety, frustration and disappointment. In response to these negative feelings, newcomers accessed several resources
that they felt would adequately meet their emotional, psychological and financial needs. They sought comfort and aid from their families, their faith and community organizations. In essence, family and friends played a central role in the lives of the newcomers, providing them with motivation, comfort and happiness. In addition to social support systems, newcomers sought religious resources as well. By worshipping, beseeching, thanking and trusting in Allah, Muslim newcomers found comfort, strength, peace and hope. Furthermore, in order to fulfill their need for some concrete strategies and resources, some of the participants sought help from community resources such as newcomer centres, family counselling services and mosques. The combination of these resources allows South Asian Muslim newcomers to maintain their mental health and sustain a positive outlook on their new life in Canada.
Chapter 6
Conclusion

The current study sought to explore the resources available to newcomers to help them cope with challenges due to settlement. It was found that the newcomers experienced a substantial amount of mental distress due to loneliness, clash of cultural values, career development challenges and identity issues due to loss of status. However the participants proved to be resilient in the face of these hardships due to their strong coping systems consisting mainly of their faith and their family. Participants reported that their family members were large contributors to their mental health as the family provided both emotional and material support. At a deeper psychological level, the participants’ faith provided them with hope, meaning, strength and comfort. The newcomers in this study had a series of integral religious beliefs that helped them to frame their negative experiences of immigration in a positive manner. Despite their strong faith, most participants were not active members of the mosque primarily due to the inaccessibility of the distant mosque. In the end, all of the participants felt that although they faced much difficulty in settling in Canada, the benefits of living in Canada were still plentiful.

6.1 Implications for counselling practice

This study highlights several points of consideration for the counselling field. The first is that although newly-arrived immigrants do face many hardships, they are also a resilient group capable of forming healthy, effective coping systems. Faith and family play a crucial role in helping Muslim immigrants in times of distress. Furthermore, seeking help from outside sources for their distress is not part of the worldview of the participants. More specifically, psychotherapy and counselling is still very stigmatized in the South Asian community and is seen only as a last resort for those who are suffering from psychiatric disorders, and not for issues perceived to be merely normative stress. A key element here, however, is that where the participants’ pre-existing coping skills were sufficient for dealing with life’s stresses in their native countries, where their world views were dominant, Canadian culture presents a conflicting set of dominant world views which, in turn, cast a new and foreign set of challenges upon the newcomers. These distinctive challenges have been discussed throughout this paper to include; loneliness, clash of cultural values, career development challenges and identity issues due to
loss of status. Derived from the narratives of the participants and the research surrounding this issue is a need for a “hybrid” approach to serving the South Asian Newcomer communities in order to more holistically meet their mental health needs. Collaboration between Canadian social service organizations, mental health professionals, imams, and mosques could greatly contribute to a higher level of accessibility to mental health services for this particular population.

Second, given the newcomers’ propensity to stay within their ethnic enclaves, the challenge for social service providers is how to reach those individuals who may not have supportive family supports or a strong faith system to help them. A suggestion given by one of the participants in this study was to provide information about social services right at the airport in the information package given upon arrival. These packages typically contain mainly administrative and logistic forms but if they also provided information about social services available to newcomers who could encounter problems of abuse, substance abuse, mental health issues, and other social problems, at least the newcomers would have greater access to these resources. For example, an excellent resource to include within the packages could be the Community Resource Connections of Toronto’s Navigating Mental Health Services in Toronto: A guide for newcomer communities. This resource is a comprehensive guide to sustaining mental health in newcomers with coping tips, mental health services and information about community organizations. This document is available in several languages including Urdu and Punjabi.

Finally, it would beneficial to help mosques form a referral service where imams can refer their congregants who are in need of more than just religious guidance. Even though most of the participants were not active members of the mosque, they all knew where the closest mosque was. If they were in a situation where they felt they needed professional help, a possible place to seek information could be the mosque. It was clear that the participants who did use the mainstream community services greatly valued culturally-competent services, and the mosque could either offer those services or at least provide referrals for professionals who are familiar with the Muslim culture. Community organizations that address social issues relevant to the South Asian community could also take an active role in helping to serve these communities by building relationships with the imams of the local mosques.
In summary, the South Asian Muslim newcomers in this study have developed unique, culturally and religious relevant coping systems that helped to address their mental health needs as they settle into Canada.

6.2 Limitations to this study

There were several limitations to this study that are discussed below, along with ways to improve on future studies.

Firstly, the participants were recruited through my own personal contacts and so many of them came from the same social circle, which could have accounted for their similar experiences and perceptions. Therefore, the results of this study can not be generalized to the South Asian Muslim community in general, although they do lend clues as to some trends and perceptions that may exist in the community.

Efforts were made to have a more general recruitment through posting advertisements in areas that were frequented greatly by South Asians but the flyers were ineffective at drawing participants. This speaks to the discussed reluctance of many South Asian Muslims to disclose personal information beyond the boundaries of their close friends and families. A more effective and unbiased method of recruitment would be to form alliances with community service organizations that serve this community in much the same collaborative manner as has been proposed within this section because participants proved to be more comfortable sharing their stories when they knew of the researcher. This would have allowed the collection of a larger variety of experiences and perceptions.

Secondly, the subjects in this study were not interested in verifying the analysis of the results and therefore a measure to verify accuracy and validity is absent from the study. Given the subjective nature of this analysis, it is possible and probable that my personal views and biases impacted the analysis of the results. In the future, it would be important to establish a team of co-researchers that included people of different ethnicities than those of the population being studied in order to guard for personal biases and assumptions made by the investigator.

Thirdly, the data collected in this study were self-reported, retrospective accounts of the immigration and settlement experience of the participants. As such, it could be that the
participants painted a more positive picture of their experience in order to appear more resilient and positive in front of a stranger. Furthermore, as the participants did not personally know me, they may have been reluctant to disclose serious issues they may have encountered during their first few months in Canada. Nevertheless, the participants appeared to be very open and candid during the interviews, especially when describing employment difficulties.

6.3 Directions for future research

The participants in this study reported to be self-sufficient and mentally healthy individuals. Given that they had social support systems and positive religious beliefs, they did not feel they needed professional help. It would be interesting to examine their counter-parts in a similar study; this study could be replicated with individuals who are socially isolated or suffer from mental health disorders to examine the help-seeking behaviours of those individuals.

Furthermore, further research is required in the services offered at mosques, whether formal or informal, in order to understand what additional resources are available to newcomers and if community organizations can help facilitate those resources in any way. Collaborating with imams of mosques on this type of project would be essential to garner participants.

Lastly, although the children of the participants in this study were young, many of the parents were already anticipating challenges in maintaining their cultural and religious values in their children. If the parents are forced to address issues which they were never exposed to before, such as dating, alcohol and drug use, premarital sex and general adolescent rebellion, they may feel a need to reach out of their families in order to receive additional support. Replication this study with South Asian Muslim parents of adolescents, or even the adolescents themselves, may yield different results and highlight a different set of needs for this community.

6.4 Summary

This study sought to investigate the resources used by newcomer South Asian Muslims who were in the process of settling in Canada. Ten South Asian Muslims were interviewed and the interviews were analyzed using Grounded Theory. From the interviews, the participants highlighted several challenges they faced as they settled into Canada and how those challenges made them feel. The most significant challenge seemed to be the loss of status due to difficulty securing employment that matched the credentials of the newcomers. The loss of status made the
participants feel lost, devalued, angry, frustrated and stressed. For those participants with no social support systems in Toronto, those feelings were magnified as they also felt alone and isolated. Another challenge the newcomers felt was the clash of cultural values between Canadian and Muslim culture. Canadian culture’s seeming emphasis on the individual, secular society posed a threat to the newcomers need to provide their children with cultural continuity.

In face of these challenges, the participants had access to several resources such as their family and their faith. Participants listed their social networks as one of the biggest contributors to their mental wellbeing. They felt that their family could provide them with comfort, motivation and wisdom that helped the participants face the challenges of settling in Canada. Furthermore, the participants possessed several healthy religious beliefs that informed their perception and processing of the challenges they faced as newcomers. These thoughts were embedded in Islam’s teachings and therefore were not only a way to maintain mental health but also an important part of practicing their religion. Islamic teachings allowed the newcomers to reframe their challenges in a positive light and as opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. In sum, when the resources they accessed proved to be culturally-safe and relevant, the newcomers also found them to be more effective in meeting their needs, thus furthering the importance of assuring a hybrid and holistic approach to sustaining the mental health of South Asian Muslim newcomers in Canada.
References


Cultures under siege: Collective violence and trauma (pp. 194). New York: Cambridge University Press.


Appendix A

Recruitment flyer

ARE YOU A NEW DESI TO CANADA? HAS ISLAM TOUCHED YOUR LIFE?

I am a master’s student at the University of Toronto and I would like to learn more about your experience as a Desi Muslim settling in Canada. If you are interested in sharing your experience with me, and have immigrated to Canada in the past five years, please contact me.
Appendix B

Information letter
[to be printed on OISE letterhead]

My name is Linah Hashimi, and I am a student at OISE (the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) at the University of Toronto. I am supervised by Dr. Roy Moodley, a faculty member at OISE. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study, which I am conducting as part of the requirements for my Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT?
The topic of this research is the experience of settling in Canada as a South Asian Muslim. Settling in a new country can often be difficult and frustrating, and I would like to learn how you coped with this process. Specifically, I am interested in whether or not you used religious support to help manage the struggles of moving to a new country, and what about that support was helpful or unhelpful. I hope my findings will generate ideas for the development of recommendations and resources for counsellors and other health practitioners who work with South Asian Muslim immigrants.

I am looking for adult men or women who:
- **Have immigrated to Canada in the past five (5) years.**
  - Specifically, I am looking for people who have immigrated for the first time from their home country
- **Identify themselves as Muslim**
- **Identify themselves as South Asian (or Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali)**
- Speak English or Urdu
- Are at least 18 years of age

Approximately 10-12 people will be interviewed for this study.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?
You will be asked to participate in one audio-taped interview that will last between 1 and 2 hours. In the interview, you will be asked to talk about the story of your settlement process and what resources you used to help you get through difficult times, and the feelings and thoughts that you experienced. You can request to see a list of the topics that I will ask about beforehand, if you wish. The interview will be conducted by me, Linah Hashimi. Some time later, you will be sent a copy of the transcript of your interview, accompanied by some written discussion of the interview’s content (i.e. my interpretations of, and comments about, some of the information you provided). You will have the opportunity to review the transcript and discussion, and to provide suggestions, corrections, and comments. This feedback would be appreciated, but is optional.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me either by phone or e-mail. We can arrange a suitable time and space for me to meet with you to discuss the research and answer any questions you may have. Alternately, we could have this discussion via phone. After this discussion, we would arrange a time for the actual interview, if you wish to participate.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?
No. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate at any time, decline to answer any question, or withdraw during the course of the interview, without any negative consequences.

ARE THERE RISKS AND BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING?
**Risks**
During the course of the interview, you may choose to share sensitive information: for instance, memories of a difficult time during your stay in Canada. This has the potential to be emotionally upsetting, which is
the only foreseeable risk associated with your participation in this research. **If, at any point, you wish to take a break, change topics, or stop the interview, you may do so without any negative consequences.** You will have the opportunity, once the interview is finished to discuss the interview process that you have just been through.

**Benefits**
Your participation in this research might have the following benefits:
- Sharing your experience of settling in Canada may raise awareness of the fact that this is a complicated and challenging transition (for many people).
- People sometimes find that telling aloud the stories of significant events in their lives, such as moving to a new country, can bring to light personal insights which are interesting and useful for their own learning, growth, and development
- If you need help with certain situations, I will do my best to connect you with people who may be able to help you.
- The results of this research could be used to develop materials or recommendations for counsellors, chaplains, and mental health workers who work with Muslim immigrants.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION AFTER I HAVE PARTICIPATED?**
The information you provide will remain strictly confidential, and you will be invited to choose a pseudonym so that no-one can identify you. In addition, the information you provide will be carefully edited to remove or disguise personal details which may even remotely identify you. The data collected for this research may be used for publication in journals or books, and/or for public presentations, but your identity will *not* be revealed. The data (full transcripts and interview recordings) will be retained for a period of one year by me, Linah Hashimi, and will be kept in a locked filing box at my home office. My advisor and I are the only people who will have access to this data. After one year, paper documents will be shredded and CDs will be broken.

If you change your mind about participating after the interview is complete, you can still contact me to withdraw from the study. However, once the information from your interview has been fully analyzed and combined with other people’s information, you can no longer withdraw. I will inform you of this deadline at least two weeks before it occurs.

If you would like to see the results of this research when they become available, I would be very happy to offer them to you; please check the box next to “I would like to receive a summary of the results” on the Consent Form.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Ethics Review Office by e-mail (ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or phone (416-946-3273). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Roy Moodley, at roymoodley@oise.utoronto.ca.

If you would like to participate in this study, or if you have any questions, please contact me by e-mail or phone. Thank you for considering participation in this research.

Linah Hashimi  
M.A. Student, OISE/University of Toronto  
Counselling Psychology  
252 Bloor Street West  
Toronto ON M5S 1V6  
647-968-5462  
lhashimi@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix C

Consent form
[to be printed on OISE letterhead]

If there is anything you do not understand about the information letter or this consent form, or if you wish to ask any questions, please speak to the researcher.

I understand that if I share any information that suggests I may be at risk of harming myself or others, then the researcher is legally required to contact the local authorities. If I share any information regarding a child who is currently being abused or potentially abused, then the researcher is legally required to report this information to Children Aid Society, which may result in a case being opened. This is the only instance in which my identity would be revealed (due to legal requirements).

1. Volunteer’s declaration of informed consent

☐ I have been given a written explanation of the study by the investigator (Linah Hashimi), including full details of any potential psychological risks and what participation entails. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

☐ I have had enough time to think about the study, and to decide without pressure if I want to take part.

☐ I fully understand everything in the written explanation and in the consent form.

☐ I therefore agree that I will take part in this study.

Name: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

2. Pseudonym

I have chosen the following pseudonym for myself: ________________________________

3. Contact information

☐ I am willing to receive a copy of the transcript and preliminary analysis for my interview.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of this study’s results.

If you have checked either of the above boxes, please fill out the information below.

Please send me the above items by:

☐ E-mail

☐ Canada Post
Address: ______________________________________________________________

City and Province: ______________________________________________________

Postal Code: ____________________________________________________________

E-mail address: __________________________________________________________

4. **Researcher responsible for conducting the informed consent process:**
I confirm that I have explained the nature of the research and supplied the volunteer with an information letter explaining the nature of this study and the volunteer’s participation in terms that, in my judgment, are suited to their understanding.

Name: ________________________ Signature: ______________________ Date: __________
Appendix D

Demographic form

Pseudonym:

Gender:

Occupation:

Age:

Years since you have left your home country:
Appendix E

Semi-structured interview guide

Introduction

Explanation of the purpose, method, procedure of the research
Explanation of right, privacy and confidentiality
Explanation of benefits and risks
Explanation of free and informed consent
Completion of the free and informed consent

Semi-Structured Interview Question

Pre-Immigration
- Tell me about why you decided to immigrate to Canada
- Tell me about how you prepared and how long it took.

Post-Immigration
- What was it like for you when you landed? Any differences from your expectations?
- What was the most experience difficult after immigration? Any unexpected difficulties?
- How long did it take you to feel well adjusted? Until then, how did you manage?
- How did you cope with the stresses of moving? Where did you get your information from?
- How do you find your community here? What experiences contributed to these feelings?
- What do you do when you feel homesick? How is that helpful?

Mainstream health services and help-seeking
- How do you take care of yourself when you do not feel good, either physically or emotionally?
- What type of mainstream services have you used? How did you find them helpful/unhelpful?

Religious Coping with Settlement Process
- How did you practice your faith?
- Tell me about your spiritual changes after immigration.

Conclusion
Participant’s comments on the experience of the interview and expressing thanks to the participant