

Cultural Diversity vs. Homogeneity's Impact on Refugees' Mental Health, Settlement, and Integration in the Host Country: Syrian Refugees in the United States*

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This study explores the impact of a host community's level of cultural diversity on the integration ability and mental health of Syrian refugees resettling into two U.S. States: California and Idaho. This paper addresses the need for effective integration strategies, mainly due to their impact on mental health, given the current pressing conflicts in the Middle East and the global refugee crisis. This paper uses a comparative analysis of existing literature to examine how refugees hosted in more culturally diverse communities, such as California, experience better means of integration and thus have improved mental health than those hosted in culturally homogenous communities, such as Idaho. Additionally, the study concluded that refugees who can assimilate into a community experience fewer mental health issues. The findings provide valuable insight and information for policymakers seeking to improve refugee integration through nuanced strategies. The study suggests further primary research to discover additional impacts of a community's cultural diversity on refugees' integration ability.

Keywords: refugees, mental health, social integration, cultural diversity, resettlement, loneliness

Introduction

The world's unprecedented rise in refugees, which reached 117.3 million populations globally (UNHCR US, 2022), necessitates a focus on the resettlement experiences of refugees. One captivating area of inquiry is how host communities yield specific societal characteristics that impact refugees' mental health and psychological well-being. This paper examines the role of cultural diversity and its effects on refugee integration, affecting their experience of displacement and incorporation into American societies. Furthermore, this paper aims to compare the experiences of Syrian refugees in culturally diverse states like California with those in relatively homogenous states such as Idaho.

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Cultural diversity contains various factors and components. This study primarily focuses on cultural diversity through the precedence of diversified ethnic groups, various practiced cultures, and support systems for varied ethnicities, which are significantly underrepresented minorities. The elements and degree of cultural diversity can substantially impact the assimilation process for refugees and contribute to their overall mental health and psychological well-being. Our study aims to delve into this inquiry, focusing on the effects of homogeneity in states such as California, known for its multicultural environment, which we believe facilitates improved psychological well-being and enhanced integration for refugees. In contrast, states with less cultural diversity and ethnocentric tendencies, in this case, Idaho, may present increased social isolation, limited access to culturally relevant resources, higher levels of discrimination and prejudice, and an overall lack of community and other unique challenges.

With a focus on Syrian refugees in the US, the following question guides this study, “How does the cultural diversity of a host community impact refugees’ mental health, specifically their psychological well-being, in cosmopolitan states like California compared to relatively homogenous states like Idaho?” This inquiry explores the relationship between cultural diversity and homogeneity and its effect on integration and mental health outcomes.

The paper’s thesis acknowledges the relationship between both variables, positing that cultural diversity in host communities is vital to integration, mental health outcomes, and the psychological well-being of refugees. Refugees in California are much more likely to experience positive integration and smooth assimilation processes than in homogenous states like Idaho, where the opposite is much more likely to occur. Refugees placed in homogenous states, such as Idaho, are much more likely to experience a sense of isolation due to a lack of cultural diversity, among other issues, such as reduced access to cultural resources, language barriers, and heightened mental health disorders as well as general psychological stress.

This comparative study analyzes differing environments, seeking to provide valuable and essential insights into the effect of varying cultural diversity on refugee integration and experience. Based on this research, understanding this insight is critical when prioritizing refugee well-being. Crafting specific interventions and policies can strengthen refugees’ support systems. This, in turn, will facilitate more effective integration and lead to better mental health outcomes for these at-risk populations, creating a more outstanding quality of life for refugees, as well as more peaceful and healthy host communities.

Background and Literature Review

Beginning in 2011, the ongoing Syrian Civil War has uprooted millions of Syrians and forced them to seek refuge in foreign countries such as the United States. Over half of the population, around 22 million Syrians, have left their home as a result of continued warfare (Armstrong-Mensah, Mitha, & McNair, 2023). The civil war that followed the Arab Spring, during which Syrian groups protested the authoritarian Syrian regime, grew in intensity as local political and security issues intertwined with regional and global politics (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

Living in conflict zones likely leads to the development of mental health issues. Around a quarter of the world’s population lives in areas affected by war. They are exposed to severe, recurring traumatic experiences, including bombings, shootings, and loss of loved ones. Often, these individuals are exposed to highly violent acts firsthand, leaving a lasting imprint on the mind. 22% of those living in conflict zones have been shown to develop depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia (Charlson, van Ommeren, Flaxman, Cornett,

Whiteford, & Saxena, 2019). Having lived in a conflict zone, many Syrian refugees find mental health issues to surface. For example, 31% of Syrian refugees have shown severe emotional disorders, while 20% have developed anxiety (Leigh, 2014).

The Syrian Civil War has not only left refugees with long-term trauma as a result of warfare but so does their displacement to the United States. Forced to desert their homes due to violence, many Syrian refugees lose their safety, stability, and identity. Although they flee Syria for protection, Syrian refugees who resettle in the United States face another obstacle: racialization, the language barrier, and unemployment.

Upon their arrival to the United States, Syrian refugees are legally classified as “White”, stripping them of their culture and identity (Armstrong-Mensah et al., 2023). Despite this, because many Syrian refugees are Muslim, they are often the victims of racism as they are commonly associated with terrorism, putting a risk to their physical safety (Zarrugh, 2016) because they are seen as a threat and can become victims of xenophobia-fueled attacks. Ultimately, the racialization of Syrian refugees is not only inaccurate, but it also further excludes Syrian refugees from the rest of American society.

Another obstacle Syrian refugees fall victim to, is the language barrier. A Syrian refugee study participant in California reported, “The number one challenge is the language.” (Manring, Hawk, Calhoun, & Andersen, 2009). Forced out of their routines and homes in the Middle East, some Syrian refugees are forced to move to a foreign country with a foreign language, posing many barriers. For example, there are not many available medical professionals who speak Arabic fluently, which results in many Syrian refugees going to health professionals who they cannot understand as well, leading to a limitation in their healthcare in America (Manring et al., 2009). Not only does the language barrier damage Syrian refugee’s access to healthcare, but it also inhibits many social interactions. Especially with women refugees, who generally speak less English than their male counterparts, this language barrier takes a significant toll on their ability to socialize and ability to relate to others; instead, this lack of shared language further outcasts Syrian refugees (Atrooz, Chen, Biekman, Alrousan, Bick, & Salim, 2022).

As a result of language barriers, Syrian refugees also find trouble with unemployment after entering the United States. On top of that, many Syrian medical licenses are not recognized with the same validity in America as they are in Syria, which results in many overqualified professionals being left unemployed (Fix, Hooper, & Zong, 2017).

Difficulty in integration and assimilation added to their war-impacted trauma aggravates their mental health symptoms. Although mental health services are available, many of the refugees, due to cultural stigma, fail to use such services. Typically, Syrian communities stigmatize mental health issues as they are associated with flaws in character and signs of derangement. Therefore, many Syrian refugees struggle to utilize mental health services in America due to their long-term internal stigmatization of mental health issues and a prideful unwillingness to seek help (Bär et al., 2021).

Considering all the barriers mentioned above to integration and their impact on the mental health of Syrian refugees, this study underscores the best policies to promote the well-being of the refugees and their healthy integration within the host communities, both in culturally diverse and homogenous communities such as California and Idaho.

Why Compare the Resettlement of Refugees Between Idaho and California?

The authors focus on the contrasting environments of California and Idaho to explore how cultural diversity and available resources impact the integration of refugees. The two states represent two very different

demographics in the culturally and politically diverse United States. These two states represent significantly different resettlement environments, showing the broader implications of cultural diversity and community composition on refugees' integration experience.

California is one of the most culturally diverse States in the U.S., home to extensive and established refugee and immigrant communities that offer supportive networks for those looking for a new home. California has been named the second most diverse state in the U.S. (behind Hawaii) and boasts a diversity index score of 69.7% (Hubbard, 2021; Lu, 2024). In contrast, Idaho is culturally homogenous, the 11th least culturally diverse state in the US, with a diversity index score of 35.9% (Hubbard, 2021). Idaho's population is predominantly Caucasian and has a minimal presence of Arab and Middle Eastern communities. The difference in demographics between these two resettlement locations allows us to examine how varying levels of cultural diversity affect social integration and psychological well-being.

Another remarkable difference is the availability of resources for refugees between the two states. California has robust support systems that include linguistic support, healthcare, and mental health institutions focused on refugee well-being. California's vast availability of resources for refugees contrasts greatly with Idaho's limited supply of resources and limited institutions focused on supporting refugees. By comparing these two environments, we can assess how the accessibility and quality of resources influence refugee integration outcomes.

Furthermore, California's progressive policies to support immigrants stand uncontested against Idaho's policy framework, which is centered around a much more conservative approach with much less focus on immigrants. Through a comparative policy analysis, we can gain insight into how these policies either facilitate or hinder the integration process for refugees, offering insights into successful resettlement tactics.

While urban, diverse areas, such as California, have existing research regarding refugee experience and have gained valuable insight regarding resettlement, more studies need to examine the difference between refugee resettlement and integration experience in less diverse, rural settings such as Idaho. This comparative analysis aims to fill that gap by focusing on these two states, providing valuable insight that can form perspective and even practical policymaking.

Through this study's comparative lens, we aim to review the experiences of Syrian refugees whose integration experience has been or could be affected by the level of cultural diversity, ultimately contributing to effective refugee integration strategies.

Idaho's Lack of Resources and Cultural Diversity Can Lead Refugees to Feel Isolated, Which Can Reduce Their Well-Being, Self-confidence, and Belonging

Idaho presents unique demographic characteristics. While it is one of the fastest-growing States, bringing increasingly diverse populations, Idaho is still one of the least diverse states in the United States of America. Idaho's percentage of representatives of the Caucasian population stands at 86.54% (Idaho Population, 2024). Idaho's diversity index score in 2020 was 35.9% compared to California's 69.7% (Hubbard, 2021; Lu, 2024). Despite its low diversity score, Idaho is still a resettlement location for refugee groups, including the Syrian refugee population. 85.1% of refugees reside in the Boise metro area, while the remaining 14.9% reside in Twin Falls, Idaho (Idaho Office for Refugees, n.d.). This makes refugees' resettlement highly concentrated in a few places within an extremely homogeneous state. Idaho is on track to welcome 1,050 refugees in fiscal year 2024, having already welcomed 898 refugees. Below is a graphic of the nationality/ethnicity of refugees welcomed into

Idaho. Forty-six Syrian refugees have been accepted to Idaho so far in FY24 (Idaho Office for Refugees, n.d.). The potential of Syrian refugee integration in Idaho is further complicated by the fact that only 0.27% of Idaho's population is Arab, or 5,235 out of 1,939,000, as indicated by the World Population Review (ZipAtlas.com, 2024).

Moreover, Boise, Idaho's primary resettlement location, has an Arab population of 0.98%, or 2,319, of its total population, 236,634 people (ZipAtlas.com, 2024). These statistics make Idaho a place that lacks established Arab communities. Not only does this make Idaho less diverse, but it makes Idaho an extremely culturally homogeneous state for Syrian refugees and other Middle Eastern refugee populations. The lack of Arab communities, and especially other Syrian refugees, makes it especially hard to integrate into Idaho, for diversity reasons, as well as a lack of refugee resources is a prominent issue. The isolation refugees experience in culturally homogeneous areas such as Idaho can significantly impact their overall well-being, confidence, and sense of belonging, making it incredibly challenging to integrate into society as a refugee (Löbel, Kröger, & Tibubos, 2022). Understanding the challenges of integration dynamics in culturally homogeneous communities is crucial for developing potential solutions to foster a greater sense of community and easier integration in culturally homogeneous communities such as Idaho.

In Idaho, the culturally homogeneous environment makes it challenging for refugees to develop social connections and relatability through communities that may have shared their experiences. A study found that refugees, compared to other groups such as migrants, experience the highest levels of social isolation (Nguyen, Al Asaad, Sena, & Slewa-Younan, 2024). The condition of social isolation is a factor of many variables, but primarily due to the environment they inhabit. Social isolation leads to further difficulties when adapting to a new life and can often lead to more prominent mental health issues and anguish (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).

When referring to the "environment they inhabit", cultural diversity is the topic. Cultural diversity is essential in building community and support for refugees seeking to create a new life in the United States and everywhere else. The study from NCBI indicates that refugees with social networks and communities they can associate with can respond to feelings of isolation and loneliness better than those who lack a community they can associate with (Löbel et al., 2022). In Idaho, the culturally homogeneous environment makes it more difficult for refugees to find relevant communities to associate with, as there is a lack of diversity and Middle-Eastern populations, considering the populations of Arabs are low, and there are minimal Syrian refugee populations and refugee populations in general.

When refugees can associate with communities and recognize their culture in a foreign area, they feel they belong. This sense of belonging validates their strenuous, traumatic experiences, creating a sense of acceptance. In culturally homogeneous communities such as Idaho, these associative communities are lacking; refugees may feel disconnected from the general population and community. The lack of connection to the general population can end up alienating refugee communities, creating biases and stereotypes towards these small groups, and further isolating them (McLean Hospital, 2022).

Strategies that promote cultural diversity and resource availability for refugees are essential to addressing the challenges faced by refugees in Idaho. Resources include further mental health services, employment support, educational programs, and integration assistance. Idaho can create an environment that mitigates feelings of isolation by prioritizing these efforts and enhancing the overall well-being of the Syrian refugee population in particular.

Idaho's limited resources for language services further complicate the integration process for refugees. The overall lack of a diverse population and very significant refugee populations leads Idaho to believe they have less need to allocate abundant resources, such as linguistic assistance and public services to help refugees assimilate and integrate into society in comparison to more diverse states such as California which have an abundance of resources to support successful adaptation. Boise does have services, but the rest of Idaho has barely any tools and resources to assist refugees. This, among other reasons, such as cultural diversity, leads Boise to have a large concentration of Idaho's refugee population.

Idaho has limited base-level employment opportunities, primarily workplaces specializing in manufacturing and agriculture, which may not align with the average refugee skillset (Messick, 2012; Maldonado, 2024). Education support could also be better with limited English as a second language programs, which can cause a linguistic gap, further alienating and isolating refugees in Idaho. Furthermore, Idaho also has a significant housing crisis, needing 25,000 available living spaces to meet the housing shortage crisis for the lowest-income residents (Press, 2022; Maldonado, 2023). While Idaho has resources to a certain degree, many gaps are even more predominant in other Idaho cities, such as Twin Falls or Coeur D'Alene, which have much less available to aid refugees through the integration process.

In conclusion, the interplay between Idaho's homogeneous population and limited resources significantly impacts refugees' quality of life, making it much harder for them to integrate into society and leading to social isolation. By understanding the impacts and causes of social isolation through homogeneity and lack of resources, we can implement targeted interventions to help build environments for refugees to thrive.

California's Cultural Diversity and Well-Equipped Resources Create Welcoming Environments for Refugees Where They Can Successfully Integrate

Historically, California has been a destination for refugees worldwide due to its comforting diversity and assistive resources. California's progressive and inclusive policies and immigrant-friendly communities provide a supportive environment for Syrian refugees.

California's population is incredibly diverse demographically: 52% of children in California are Latinos, over 25% of California's citizens are immigrants, and Asia still provides the most immigrants to California (Johnson, McGhee, Subramaniam, & Hsieh, 2023). While roughly 12% of the US population lives in California, 23% of immigrants nationwide live in California, clearly demonstrating the comfort and security California holds for foreign immigrants (Klaus, 2023; Johnson et al., 2023).

In California, immigrants can find a greater sense of belonging while speaking a foreign language, as California is home to countless languages and dialects. A 2015 US Census report reports that around 44% of California households speak a language distinct from English (State of California—Department of Justice—Office of the Attorney General, 2016). Because of its history as a host to many immigrants and refugees, California offers an environment that allows individuals from foreign countries to feel more included and less ostracized for linguistic differences.

Between 2011-2016, 11% of Syrian refugees, around 2000 people, to the United States were hosted in California, mainly among Sacramento, San Diego, and Los Angeles counties (Zong & Batalova, 2017; CIDP, n.d.). As a racially heterogeneous state, California, home to numerous refugees, immigrants, and minorities, provides a welcoming environment to Syrian refugees. In California, Syrian refugees can find comfort amongst the comparatively large population of other Syrian refugees, and there are many different cultures and populations

embraced in the state. On top of that, California is home to 31% of the Syrian immigrant population in the United States, further creating a more inclusive environment for uprooted Syrian refugees.

California's diversity provides Syrian refugees with communities that support and understand the challenges of moving to a foreign country. Many Syrian refugees, in particular, find comfort in living in existing Arab or Muslim communities, which contain support networks and individuals who underwent similar conditions. For example, a recent study in California revealed that just under 375,000 individuals in California identify as Arab American and live in cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, Irvine, and Anaheim (Nash, Ismail, & Vace, 2023). Getting forcibly displaced from your country and being forced into a foreign one can be incredibly daunting. Still, many Syrian refugees find solace in communities of people who can speak their native language and relate to their new circumstances. These established immigrant communities, mainly in Southern California, help Syrian refugees feel less isolated during their transition to the United States.

As a result of the large refugee population in California, the state offers many health and support resources. For instance, the Family Health Centers of San Diego provide health care that accommodates refugees' cultures and languages. The organization aims to provide affordable health care for refugees within 90 days of arriving in the United States (Home, n.d.). Many refugees can access healthcare resources through the Affordable Care Act, passed in 2010. This act allows refugees to afford health care with significant financial assistance and attain a linguistic interpreter under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act (HealthCare.gov, 2024).

Additionally, in California, refugees can take advantage of the public transportation system, along with the system's affiliate programs. California invests heavily in its public transport system, allowing refugees the power of mobility. Not only do these public transportation services allow refugees to travel around for cheap rates, but they also provide lines to employment, healthcare, and social services. In California, many policies offer subsidies and reduced fares for individuals like refugees. For example, refugees and low-income residents in Los Angeles can apply for free travel on California's public transport (Mikhnova, 2023).

California also prides itself on its affordable housing programs; despite its reputation for having unlivable living costs, California partners with federal agencies that allow some Syrian refugees to qualify for public housing vouchers and distributes subsidies from the government (California Department of Housing and Community Development, n.d.). Additionally, California invests time and local initiative into affordable housing projects that allow low-income and migrant families the opportunity to resettle in government homes.

Although Idaho's economy is growing, California has one of the largest economies in the world. It would be ranked as the fifth largest economy worldwide, between Japan and India, if it were a country (Hughes, 2023). Because of its sheer magnitude and scope, California offers numerous job opportunities in numerous sectors, from its multitude of agriculture jobs in rural California to its high-paying technology jobs in Silicon Valley. Refugees can find jobs easier in California than in Idaho, especially in populated cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Additionally, California offers many resources that aid refugees in finding employment. The Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP), run by the California Department of Social Services, assists refugees by providing job training, job searches, and linguistic help for those whose native language is not English. RRP also offers monetary support for refugees during their first year of eligibility in the program (Ca.gov, 2024).

Contrasting Idaho's dominantly conservative political climate, California contains more of a progressive stance on refugee issues. To be sure, Idaho openly welcomes refugees into their state; however, California tends to carry out more progressive policies that better assist refugees and immigrants. For example, many of

California's cities have become "sanctuary cities", which offer a more inclusive and secure living environment for refugees. Sanctuary cities typically hinder local officials from reporting the immigration status of individuals. Many of these cities do not respond to ICE requests to arrest undocumented immigrants; however, these cities will report on immigration statuses in the event of a severe crime (Global Refuge, 2021). These sanctuary cities offer a community where immigrants and refugees feel safe and comfortable. Many large and urban areas of California have become sanctuary cities in recent years, with San Francisco in the 1980s and both Los Angeles and Sacramento in 2017 (Nieri, Ramachandran, Bruckner, Link, & Ayón, 2023).

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative analysis of secondary scholarly literature and statistical data. This serves as a synthesis of scholarly work on refugees in diverse and relatively homogeneous cultures to compare the experiences of Syrian refugees whose integration experience has been or could be affected by the level of cultural diversity, ultimately contributing to effective refugee integration strategies. These studies were done by Nguyen et al.'s (2024) on loneliness and social isolation of refugees in high-income countries, analysing the mental health implications that accompany refugees post-resettlement, Armstrong-Mensah et al.'s (2023) on the mental health of Syrian refugees as a result of racialization and targeting in the United States, and Leigh (2014) on Syria's mental health crisis as a result of ongoing internal conflict.

It includes a synthesis of relevant research on refugees in the United States, Germany, Australia, and Sweden, including the work of Nguyen, Guajardo, Sahle, Renzaho, and Slewa-Younan (2022) on the prevalence of common mental health disorders in adult Syrian refugees in high-income, Western countries of Europe, North America, and Australasia, and Nash et al.'s (2023) analysis of the Arab-American community and its accompanying enclaves in Southern California.

Secondary quantitative studies sourced from BMC¹, PubMed, and Scopus were referenced to examine the relationship between loneliness and isolation, the impact of social support on mental health, and the role of communities in facilitating integration as reported by Chen, Wu, Ling, and Renzaho (2019) on their study on the impacts of social integration and loneliness on mental health of humanitarian migrants in Australia and Leigh-Hunt, Bagguley, Bash, Turner, Turnbull, Valtorta, and Caan's (2017) study on the public health consequences of social isolation and loneliness.

To explore the impact of culturally diverse versus relatively homogeneous communities, and to provide important insights for policymakers involved in refugee resettlement, public health, and community development, the authors conducted a comparative analysis, focusing on the hypothetical experiences of refugees resettled in California—a culturally diverse state—versus those in relatively homogeneous settings such as Idaho. The comparative analysis is based on the studies done by Armstrong-Mensah et al.'s (2023) "The Mental Health of Syrian Refugees in the United States: Examining Critical Risk Factors and Major Barriers to Mental Health Care Access" as well as Belau, Becher, and Kraemer's (2021) study on the impact of loneliness for a mediator of social relationships among refugees in Germany. These studies posit that refugees in more diverse environments are likely to experience better integration outcomes and improved mental health.

Additionally, to understand how community composition affects integration and mental health can inform decisions on where and how to resettle refugees, and to provide evidence for policies that prioritize placement in

¹ The one that uses BMC isn't listed below in the example referenced studies but studies referencing BMC are in our References.

culturally diverse environments, this qualitative research examines the roles of key stakeholders across sectors—including ICE, health agencies, and housing services—in shaping refugee experiences in both culturally heterogeneous and homogeneous communities to support refugee well-being and successful integration.

Findings, Discussion, & Analysis

This section presents existing quantitative results and findings to prove the impact of cultural diversity and an overall sense of community on the integration of refugees. We use various studies to confirm this, including those focused on the link between loneliness and isolation, the impact of social support on mental health, and communities' impact on integration.

From 2015 to 2016, Germany was the primary location of asylum for those in the Middle East who were fleeing conflict. Primarily consisting of Syrian refugees, these asylum seekers had been subject to traumatic experiences that led them to seek asylum in East Westphalia-Lippe in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The study hypothesized that “refugees will develop loneliness in the migration process due to the loss of friends and family members in their country of origin.” (Belau et al., 2021, p. 2). The study aimed to test loneliness due to the difference and almost social and cultural homogeneity of their new home, in this case, Germany.

The results from this cross-sectional study, administered by the School of Public Health at Bielefeld University in Germany, proved that “a lack of both social integration and social support were associated with poorer mental health status.” Furthermore, they found that “social integration and social support were associated with higher levels of loneliness, while loneliness was related to worse physical and mental health.” (Belau et al., 2021, p. 6).

The second half of the study provided data enforcing that social integration positively correlated with Mental Component Summary (MCS). The more integrated one is into a community, the healthier one becomes from a mental health standpoint ($r = 0.312, p < 0.001$). In contrast, loneliness and social isolation negatively correlated to MCS ($r = -0.442, p < 0.001$). The study also stated that loneliness and integration had a negative association, using the same expression to convey this ($r = -0.162, p = 0.007$) with an overall social support summary score ($r = -0.394, p < 0.001$) (Belau et al., 2021).

This study provides evidence that loneliness hinders refugees' integration ability. Host communities should be inclusive and preferably foster culturally diverse populations to most effectively integrate new, in some cases culturally divergent populations of displaced persons, reducing loneliness and strengthening social bonds.

These findings support our study by showing the impact of social isolation on the ability to integrate into a new community. This proves it is substantially more rigid for Syrian refugees to integrate into culturally homogenous communities such as Idaho, which lack a variety of cultures and Arab populations that provide the sense of community Syrian refugees yearn for to incorporate correctly. In comparison, it would be easier for Syrian refugees to integrate into California, as it boasts a much more diverse community and an abundance of Arab populations.

A second study analyzed the mental disorders of Syrian refugees in high-income Western countries. Although Syrian refugees sought safety in nearby Middle Eastern countries early on, these countries eventually could not handle the number of refugees, so they began fleeing to Western countries like Germany and Sweden.

To be sure, many of these refugees had already been exposed to potentially traumatic events before arriving in these high-income European countries; these potentially traumatic events commonly harm individuals' psychological well-being and can develop into mental health disorders (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Through the analysis of studies on databases such as SCOPUS, PubMed, and Medline, this study found prevalence rates for the common mental disorders amongst refugee populations of PTSD, depression, and anxiety and found that, on average, the refugees' rates of mental illnesses were much greater than the general population. More specifically, the study found that "mental health outcomes were worse in female, older and more educated refugees," bringing to question the role of gender in the development of mental health issues.

Because of the incredibly high numbers of displaced people and the magnitude of mental issues amongst refugees coming from a violent background like Syria, this study emphasizes the importance of further research in this area involving refugees from the Middle East settling in countries like Germany and Sweden (Nguyen et al., 2022).

An additional study analyzes the relationship between isolation and mental health issues. It utilizes several databases and focuses on ninety papers, most of which are observational studies. Through its use of multiple sources and data points, this study sheds light on the direct correlation between poor mental health and social isolation. This study dives into the physical repercussions of loneliness, such as reduced hormones and a worsened immune system (Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017), as well as behavioral effects such as increased drug and alcohol consumption. Isolated individuals lack social support and are more susceptible to stress and retreat from society. Researchers in this study found a strong correlation between social isolation and death. The authors speculate that the impacts that loneliness has on cardiovascular and mental health cause these deaths. Ultimately, this paper urges policymakers to consider isolation's role in mortality and develop strategies for prevention.

The findings from the studies shown and discussed above show a clear understanding and connection between refugees' ability to assimilate into new communities and the ability to do so through the impacts of social isolation and loneliness. The Bielefeld study, for example, provided evidence through their cross-sectional research and stated that "a lack of both social integration and social support were associated with poorer mental health status" and "social integration and social support were associated with higher levels of loneliness, while loneliness was related to worse physical and mental health." This study exhibited the impacts and benefits of social support and positive integration on the effects of loneliness, proving that one's ability to assimilate directly impacts one's mental health and well-being. The data in the study established that poor mental health is a direct product of poor integration and cultural assimilation. This is highly detrimental for refugees, leading to increased impacts of trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and depression.

Our findings highlight the importance of having diverse, supportive networks to ensure refugees can integrate successfully and experience a better quality of life through less social isolation, hence mitigating the impacts of mental health issues. A second study in our results published by BMC Psychiatry highlights the increase in mental health illness among refugees resettled in Western Countries. The data supporting this theory support our paper by showing the lessened ability to integrate into Western countries, where refugees find less of their community, leading to more difficult means of achieving assimilation and integration.

These findings highlight the importance of fostering culturally diverse, supportive environments for refugees to integrate into. Our findings support our thesis by providing statistics showing the impact of cultural homogeneity on the ability of refugees to integrate, hence leading refugees to experience social isolation. The effects of social isolation create feelings of loneliness, which are seen to impact mental health severely and can worsen trauma, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress that refugees already experience. When refugees are resettled into culturally homogenous communities such as Idaho, the lack of community present leads refugees to experience the more significant issues associated with poor integration ability. The social isolation they

experience due to a lack of a community they can associate with may lead to substantial mental illness and other detrimental impacts on refugee health.

On the contrary, when resettled into culturally diverse communities such as those in California, refugees can assimilate and integrate better, lessening their mental illness as they can integrate into a community more efficiently. Communities such as California offer refugees more opportunities to find support and build social connections, making the integration process much more manageable. The data gathered in our results emphasize the approach policymakers should consider taking, inferring that refugee integration strategies should focus on and prioritize the cultural diversity of a resettlement location or host community.

In homogenous communities, many refugees are forced to assimilate without people who have endured similar traumatic experiences as they. This isolation and lack of relatability can increase stress levels amongst refugees. Not only entering a new country but also having to endure the weight of PTSD and violence in their home countries, refugees rely on social support to process trauma and tackle the challenges of culture and language. The heightened anxiety resulting from isolation compounds with existing trauma from their displacement and civil war, makes refugees even more susceptible to lasting mental health issues. Contrastingly, refugees in heterogeneous communities can seek support in enclaves such as the populous Arab American community in Southern California. Being surrounded by those with similar traumas and life transitions greatly help refugees assimilate into a culture not too dissimilar from the one they came from.

Additionally, heterogeneous states such as California have a greater level of acceptance and tolerance. Because these regions are already made up of diverse populations, they are more accustomed to differing cultures, life experiences, and racial backgrounds. However, in homogenous communities, refugees have a greater chance at facing discrimination and prejudice. With less exposure to diverse inhabitants, homogenous states tend to further ostracize refugees from a failure of empathizing with their circumstances.

Our results extend and support our literature review, supporting our claims and reasoning that refugees can assimilate and experience a better quality of life overall in more culturally diverse host communities. For example, the Bielefeld study supports the idea that refugees experience less effective integration in more homogenous communities. The study also stated that worsened mental health impacts are a result, both of which were expressed in our literature review.

Syrian refugees come from a war zone. They were not migrants who voluntarily came for reasons or better opportunities. Instead, they left their countries to flee the war and seek safe, hospitable, and accepting areas. Though they may find cheaper opportunities than living in diverse, developed places such as California because of their mental health and anxiety, refugees want less stress and find less anxiety in more culturally diverse cosmopolitan areas.

In the long term, the disconnect between Syrian refugees and homogenous communities can cause damage not only for the refugees but also for the greater community. With these refugees socially isolated from their neighbors in states such as Idaho, naturally, divisions emerge. These divisions often find themselves embedded into systems of education, employment, and social opportunities. The potential marginalization of more individuals can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and exclusion, harming local economy and society.

There lies a great urgency in creating easier integration for Syrian refugees and other refugee communities for both the refugees as well as their new communities. Ultimately, difficult assimilation through communities without diversity leads to a sizable impact on the psychological health of refugees. In homogenous communities, the combination of trauma from violence in their former home and the social isolation in their new homes results

in refugees' collapses in mental well-being, seen with rises in anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Additionally, the social isolation affects refugees' long-term participation in the economy by hindering their employment with linguistic barriers or discrimination. On top of that, a lack of integration leads to tensions between host communities and refugees, as social disunion can create resentment and hostility. Syrians did not choose to flee their country; they were forced to. Therefore, host communities have a moral responsibility to provide refugees with the resources to thrive in their new, foreign homes. By forcing refugees to reside in homogenous communities, host countries neglect the human rights of those who have already suffered from violence and horror in their home countries.

In conclusion, the data inferred from our results show the impact of cultural diversity on integration, followed by the effects of social isolation on mental health. This data supports our literature review and thesis, showing that refugees resettled into more culturally diverse communities generally have an easier time integrating, in comparison to refugees resettled into culturally homogenous communities who experience much more isolation and mental health illness as a result of more difficulty in integrating. Generally, Idaho and other homogenous communities are less open and attractive to displaced communities as they lack the resources and diverse communities' refugees' desire.

Policymakers must look beyond the logistics of refugee resettlement and, instead, direct attention toward social and cultural factors in assimilation. As proven above, it is essential that refugees seek safety in heterogeneous communities where they can seek cultural and mental support. Furthermore, inclusive communities where refugees can feel free in expressing themselves and their identity can combat social division and encourage cultural assimilation.

Strengths and Limitations

Through a comparative analysis, the study addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the distinctions between Syrian refugees' assimilation, specifically to the communities of California and Idaho. This makes the findings relevant and potentially impactful for future research and practical limitations.

Furthermore, this paper focuses on the pressing issue of refugee integration in mental health, contextualized within the growing global refugee population, especially about Syrians as a result of the ongoing Syrian Wars. This comparative analysis offers a nuanced understanding of how our specific communities' cultures can significantly shape refugee experiences, particularly mental health outcomes.

The study's exploration of cultural diversity through ethnic representation, support systems, and cultural norms adds depth to the analysis, ensuring a comprehensive examination of how these factors affect the refugee experience. Linking cultural diversity to improved integration and mental health, this study highlights the infallibility of multicultural support for refugees. It underscores the need for policy interventions that prioritize refugee well-being.

A primary limitation of this study is its exclusive reliance on existing data points and literature rather than new, primary data. Although secondary data allow for a broader topic analysis, the study lacks primary data specific to the research question posed in the survey. The time and researchers' accessibility to refugees posed a restraint on including such information.

Additionally, one constraint of this study is its geographic limitation, as the research solely focuses on two United States communities. This scope can limit the generalizability of its findings to other states or countries

with differing cultures and refugee policies. As a result, this study's findings may not fully represent the broader refugee experience in the United States or other nations due to diverse cultural norms and integration policies.

Finally, the paper's in-depth analysis of cultural diversity and homogeneity may overlook other influential factors, such as legal challenges or individual refugee resilience that differ among Syrian refugees.

Future Research

Due to time constraints, we used a literature review and analysis of existing studies to support this research's thesis. This paper is a premise for future research and data collection to support this thesis. Interviews or quantitative surveys could be conducted to gather practical, original data to directly address this topic. Another study could be conducted through this paper to gather more details and support showing the positive impacts of cultural diversity on the resettlement abilities of refugees.

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