THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF FORCED MIGRATION ON IRANIAN-AMERICANS

A dissertation presented to the faculty of

ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY
SANTA BARBARA

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY
in
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

By

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June 4, 2015
THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF FORCED MIGRATION ON
IRANIAN-AMERICAN WHO ESCAPED IRAN’S BORDERS

This dissertation, by Hamideh Golestaneh, has been approved by the committee members
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Abstract

In this phenomenological study, thematic analysis was used to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of six Iranian-Americans who migrate Iran for safety and a better life. The researcher assessed the participants’ journey phase by phase, to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Overall, emigrating from Iran had both negative and positive outcomes. Six main domains emerged while trying to understand the lived experiences of the participants on the journey, including its emotional impact and how they coped. Data analysis yielded 6 domains and 16 themes: 1. Incentive to leave: (a) Political and civil unrest, (b) Minimal opportunities to obtain resources, (c) Religious discrimination; 2. Initial emotional respond: (a) Excitement, (b) Stress, (c) Numbness / confusion; 3. The journey: (a) Coping with physical and environmental discomfort, (b) Coping with food and water deprivation, (c) Witnessing or experiencing threat to one’s life or safety, (4) Experiencing loss: (a) Loss from Material detachment, (b) Loss from Emotional detachment, 5. Receiving support: (a) Family and friends’ support, (b) Strangers’ support, (c) Organizations’ support, and 6. Outcome: (a) Emotional impact of the journey, (b) Life satisfaction. Although the respondents lamented the loss of community life in Iran, and experienced misery on the journey, they were uplifted by the support they received, which eased their pain and kept them hopeful and strong in the face of adversity. Participants used a combination of Cognitive Approach and Avoidant Coping in different stages of their journey. Of the six participants, five were grateful for their migration to the United States and satisfied about their current lifestyle. Implications for clinical practice and future research are included.
in this study. The electronic version of this dissertation is available free at Ohiolink ETD Center, www.ohiolink.edu/etd". 
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my dear advisor, Dr. Sharleen O’Brien for guiding and supporting me over the years. You have set an example of excellence as a researcher, mentor, instructor, and role model. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Indhushree Rajan (2nd faculty) and Dr. Taghi Amjadi (external expert), and my dear friend Rebecca Fountain (student reader) for all of their guidance through this process; your ideas, and feedback have been absolutely invaluable and I am very grateful to all of you. Thank my amazing family and friends for the love, support, and constant encouragement I have gotten over the years. In particular, I would like to thank my Son, Shayan Zianour, for his support as a little boy and now as young man; you sacrificed on your childhood to help me being a student for many years. You are the main reason I am here today.

To love of my life, my husband Pejman Hadadi, Thank you for holding my hand and supporting me in this challenging journey. Thank you, to my loving parents, and my siblings: Soheila, Alireza and Mohamadreza Golestaneh, for believing in me and supporting me with generosity and love. I undoubtedly could not have done this without you.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Presented study illustrated the experience of forced migration among six Iranian-Americans who left their motherland for a safer and better future in the United States of America. The journey of forced migration was challenging and dangerous for all participants involved. They used different coping mechanisms to overcome the hardships encountered en route and ultimately dealt with migration adjustment challenges over time.

Background and Rationale for the Study

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to understand the emotional impact of forced migration on Iranian-Americans currently living in the United States, who experienced forced emigration from their homeland.

Purpose and Significance of Study

The presented study endeavored to learn about their psychological response to the journey of escape. Many research studies have examined the mental and physical health of people who were forcibly migrated from their homeland and have described the negative impact of their experience (Cernovsky, 1990; Djuretic, Crawford & Weaver, 2007; Foa, Keane, & Friedman, 2000; Fullilove, 1996; Gerritsen, Bramsen, Devillé, Willigen, Hovens, & Ploeg, 2006; Harvey, 1996). However, there was little in-depth, qualitative information regarding the coping and adaptation of Iranian-American refugees was relatively unavailable in the literature base. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to shed light on the emotional development and potential psychological issues of
Iranian-Americans currently living in the United States, who were previously forced out of their native country.

This study first seeks to explore the lived experiences in order to help understand the deeper complexities of refugees’ negative coping, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or positive coping, such as posttraumatic growth (PTG). Second, the study aims to learn how the emotional impact of the forced migration journey and the coping mechanisms employed during this experience have impacted the lifestyle of each participant. The common assumption is that going through certain hardships, such as war, torture, and fear of death of self or loved ones is not a normal life stressor and therefore the reaction to such adversity can vary from one individual to another. Some people react by breaking down emotionally while other people may go through hardship and develop more strength in the process (Slone & Shechner, 2009; Zeidner, 2005).

Research Questions

The current study was designed to answer the following questions: (a) How does the emotional impact of the forced migration journey and the coping mechanisms employed during the experience, impact the current lifestyle of Iranian Americans? (b) What were the lived experiences of the participants’ in journeys out of Iran? (c) How did they overcome challenging situations en route? (d) How did they utilized supportive resources and coped with post-migration adjustment? (e) What was the emotional impact of the journey on their lives?

Definition of Terms

A refugee is defined as a person who had to flee from their country of origin due to his or her race, religion, political affiliation, or war (International Refugee Convention,
1951). For the purpose of this study, the term “refugee” does not indicate the participants’ immigration status in U.S as refugee/asylee, but rather indicates their forced migration from their homeland. The major constructs discussed in the current study involved the positive and negative emotional outcomes and coping mechanisms used by an individual in the face of adversity, such as loss of identity, loss of belongings, and fear of death. Individuals are linked to their environment through their attachments, familiarity, and identity, any/all of which could be disrupted by forced migration (Fullilove, 1996). The researcher argues that usually an individual’s environment-of-origin is familiar and intimate to them, and their past experiences and memories become connected to the different places of that environment. Individuals who experience forced migration may experience detachment from the familiar environment with its memories and nostalgia, which can be considered as loss of self (Fullilove, 1996). As a result, a person may experience prolonged grieving, alienation, and disorientation because of losing his or her community, friends, family, language, and homeland (Fullilove, 1996). On the other hand, the role of hope, motivation, meaning making, and social support for resiliency in the stressful situation are important. These elements can be considered to be protective factors that eventually lead to a high level of endurance and growth (Berger & Weiss, 2002; Miller, 2003; Papadopoulos, 2007; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 2001). Resiliency is a multilevel and complex process; it can have many layers that can contribute to a person’s emotional well-being (Bonanno, Westphal & Mancini, 2011). The way an individual sees the problem and is able to make sense of the situation can make a difference in the outcome (Antonovsky, 1998). For example, exploring the degree of hope a refugee possessed in his or her perception of an uncertain future within
their new country, and how it can impact the coping and emotional adjustment to their new life. It is to be determined, if motivation levels assisted the individual to be protected psychologically, in the face of adversity. Also, if the roles of support in the individual’s life helped them bounce back emotionally from the negative impact of distress through such intense experiences like loss of love ones, war, and fear of arrest.

**Limitations of the Study**

The current study had four limitations that are important to understand. (a) Participants were all Iranian-American men, since the majority of people who escaped from Iran were male and avoiding the mandatory draft. (b) While the participants were recruited from Iranian communities, there are many Iranian refugees who are not part of nor in contact with the Iranian community. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to all Iranians who experienced forced migration. (c) The small number of participants may not fully illustrate the full range of emotional outcomes of this population since they faced extreme emotional stressors during their forced migration. (d) Another limiting factor to recruit volunteers from the community was lack of trust among Iranian-Americans toward system, medical filed, and threat to their confidentiality. Jallali explained that Iranians manifest mistrust in their relationship with authorities and strangers (2005). She also mentioned that the individuals must always be on guard to protect themselves; they fear that others will take advantage of them.

Overall, the result of current study concluded valuable information regarding the common experience of the journey of forced migration among the participants in the study. Participants’ description from pre to post forced migration enabled the researcher to identify different types of coping mechanism they employed in each phase. The result
showed the participants talked more about their physical pain during their journeys compare to the emotional pain they experienced. This finding is supported by previous research finding that this population may culturally be more equipped to express their distress through physical discomfort than emotional discomfort. Participants of this study showed both negative and positive outcome in their current lives.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Migration

Migration from one’s country of origin to another country has been growing rapidly. According to World Bank of the United Nations, in 2010 approximately 215 million people emigrated from their birth country and chose another country to live in (World Bank, 2011). Migration can be a prolonged and stressful process depending on one’s reason for migration. Migration from one’s country of origin to another country can be divided into two major categories, voluntary and involuntary (Berger & Weiss, 2002). Voluntary immigrants are pulled away from their homeland to better opportunities; however, forced immigrants are being pushed out of their homeland due to lack of safety (Kunz, 1973). Around the globe, millions of people have fled their homelands to seek safety in other countries. According to the latest statistics published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2010), the number of forcibly displaced people in the world has grown to 43.3 million, a number that increased by more than 1 million since the previous year (UNHCR, 2009). The UNHCR reported that in 2009, the United States and Canada resettled 80,000 and 12,500 refugees respectively (UNHCR, 2009). The Office of Refugee Resettlement (2008) reported that since 1980, the United States received above 2 million refugees, and each year more than 75,000 refugees are now coming to the United States In 2011 UNHCR reported a 20% increase in the number of asylum seekers in 44 industrial countries (UNHCR, 2011). In 1951 United Nations Conventions and UNHCR recognized refugee as:

Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, is outside the
country of his/her nationality and unable or, owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convince, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country. (UNHCR, 1995, p. 33)

The emotional processes experienced by a refugee are very different than those of a person who voluntarily migrates to another country (Stein, 1986). Typically, the reason behind voluntary migration to other countries is to construct a better life (Stein, 1986); however, refugees are forced to choose between staying in their own country—and eventually be killed, imprisoned, prosecuted, or stripped of their free will, or making the decision to flee the country. The journey of escaping one’s homeland can be a dangerous and traumatic process. In an interview of Hossein Vahedi in Men’s Journal, who said about his escape from Iran that “I never thought I’d wind up on a horse, freezing and broken, as I fled into the mountains” (Hyde, 2011). Refugees must overcome the intense emotional disturbance they experienced prior to fleeing, while simultaneously going through the painful process of losing their identity, family, friends, and community (Berger & Weiss, 2002).

The process of migration includes departure, transit, and resettlement; usually, each phase generates intense stress that may affect the individual emotionally (Drachman, & Ryan, 1991). For example, in the departure phase, the person must plan and prepare as she or he also attempt to tolerate mixed feelings regarding his/her decision to leave. This phase for the refugees is particularly intense, as the decision to leave the country is irreversible and the option of return in most cases is nonexistent (Drachman & Ryan, 1991). This phase involves significant losses, such as separation from loved ones, places, community, possessions; it includes loss of identity and fear of the unknown (Drachman
& Ryan, 1991). For instance, in the story of Vahedi’s escape from Iran, he talked about his extreme difficulties to find a smuggler and pay a large amount of money for helping him to escape from Iran to avoid going back to prison (Hyde, 2011). In the transit phase, the individual may experience anxiety about the unknown and unpredicted future while also going through the pressure of escape and waiting in a middle country, such as refugee camp, before resettlement (Drachman, & Ryan, 1991). The last phase is resettlement, in which the individual must adjust and learn the new country and culture (Drachman, & Ryan, 1991). For instance, in many cases a lack language proficiency and being in a new social system, requires stepping down a rung in his or her professional career, such as physician, engineer, and teacher (Drachman, & Ryan, 1991).

This study concentrates on Iranian-Americans who involuntarily migrated from Iran; it traces experiences from the point of knowing one has to leave through permanent resettlement in United States. In my observation, being smuggled through the boarders of Iran is an uncommon, life-threatening experience. This stage alone can impose tremendous emotional distress on a person. And yet, that is just the first stage. She or he must remain intact for the next phase--finding a way to come to United State as refugee then as an refugee/immigrant to United States finding his or her way to success without having time to reflect on his or her unique experience. Even as a member of Iranian-American community I have never heard or read much about the experience of Iranian’s escape from Iran.

**Iran’s History**

Iran’s revolution took place in 1979, and it significantly changed the landscape of the region. In 1980, a war began between Iran and Iraq, and Iran was invaded by Iraq,
launching a simultaneous invasion by air and land into Iranian territory (Bozorgmehr, 1996). Iran was at war with Iraq for eight years. As a result of the war, boys over the age of 16 were prohibited from leaving the country. By the age of 18, those who were not enrolled in a university or had not already volunteered were drafted into the army. Many of those young men and their families who were traumatized by the war attempted to escape. In addition, some political activists were in danger of being imprisoned or executed (Bozorgmehr, 1996). Furthermore, being of Bahai’ faith could put some individuals at serious risk, which forced these individuals to escape and save their own lives (Bozorgmehr, 1996). The short history of Iran’s political and social climate, which was provided earlier, could be helpful for identifying the intensity of the experience by participant prior to fleeing the country.

**Personal Experience**

In my personal experience, during the civilian air strikes, many people and I lived under tremendous fear of death. It was so hard to go to school since I was not sure if my family would be alive when I returned in the afternoon. There were a lot of nights when we would wake to the sound of an explosive that shook the whole building, similar to earthquake. It was terrifying to not to know which part of the city was being attacked and who had been killed as result of that attack. It was hard to go to school because some of my friends might be among those who had been killed the night before and I was horrified to think about it. The whole city of Tehran was operating under fear of death day and night.
**Iranian Migration**

Bozorgmehr and Sabagh suggested that there are two categories of Iranians who migrated to United States: those who migrated pre-Iranian revolution, and those who migrated post-Iranian revolution in 1979. During mid 1960s to mid 1970s, Iran went through a period of rapid industrialization, which resulted in a booming economy and prompted many Iranian students to seek higher education in the United States for technical and managerial specialties. In fact, during the 1970s, Iranian-origin foreign students were the largest group in U.S. compared to the other countries around the world (Bozorgmehr & Sabagh, 1988). After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the majority of the students who had come to United States before the revolution remained in United States through “self-imposed exile,” due to concerns about the uncertain political and economic environment of post-revolutionary Iran (Bozorgmehr, 1996). The second category of Iranians who migrated to the United States after the Iranian revolution came for very different reasons than a booming economy and higher education opportunities; they came to escape political persecution, or because they were religious non-Muslim minorities, such as Baha’is, Jews, and Christians (Bozorgmehr, 1996).

Jallali (2005) suggested that there have been four waves of Iranian immigrants to the United States since 1950. The first wave represented the group of Iranians who migrated to United States between 1950 and 1970. This group was primarily highly educated people who were already familiar with western culture; thus the process of adaptation to a new culture was easier. The second wave migrated between 1970 and 1978, and consisted of people who belonged to various social classes and were wealthy. Jallali explained that the majority of Iranian immigrants from 1970 to 1975 were highly
educated; however, most of these immigrants were coming from a more traditional Iranian culture, which made it harder for them to blend with the host culture. The third wave migrated between 1978 and 1984—just before and after the Iranian revolution—for various security purposes, such as political, economical and personal. The majority of the immigrants in the third group were affluent but of different backgrounds, educations, and age groups; unlike other groups that left voluntarily, many were forced to leave Iran. In their adjusting to living in the United States, individuals in this group experienced extreme hardship, culture shock, depression, isolation, and frustration. Jallali portrayed this group as having many losses, such as losing ties with their family, loss of social position, and loss of assets. The fourth wave arrived after 1984, which, according to Jallali, is the most heterogeneous group in terms of education, religion, wealth, and social class. In the current study the participants were mostly part of the third wave.

It is important to consider that many Iranian refugees believe that Americans hold negative views toward refugees (Bozorgmehr, 1996). The American image of refugees is the “wretched refuse of teeming shores,” as engraved on Statue of Liberty (Bozorgmehr 1996, p.214). Esses, Medianu and Lawson argued that Western media plays an important role in portraying refugees as “enemies at the gate” who are trying to take advantage of Western nations (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013, p. 530). Therefore, in order to not to be included in this statement about refugees, Iranians denied their refugee status and did not seek help as refugees. For example, less than 1 in 5 of Iranian exiles in Los Angeles received any type of organizational help in moving from Iran to the United States (Bozorgmehr, 1996). The chaotic political atmosphere between Iran and United States after 1979 also may have contributed to a negative image of Iranian immigrants and
refugees. For example, the Iranian hostage crisis, which took place 1979, put so much pressure on Iranians living in United States that a direct Presidential order was used to place them under special security control to put them in “Iranian Control Programs” (Ghazinour & Sabagh, 1988). As a result, those Iranians experienced intense fear and instability; there was a high number of deportations and visa cancelations by U.S. authorities (Ghazinour & Sabagh 1988).

It is significant to know that majority of Iranian refugees were not economic migrants (Bozorgmehr, 1992); the refugee stream from Iran has not resulted from lower socio-economic status due to the high cost of exit. For instance, cost of travel, high expenses of transit in a middle eastern? Country and difficulties of obtaining a U.S. visa were difficult obstacles to overcome for Iranian refugees without financial means. This feature distinguishes Iranian exiles from other exiles in the United States. Compared to other refugee groups and also other economic migrants, Iranians comprise one of the highest-status groups (Bozorgmehr, 1996).

**Psychological Impact**

The psychological and emotional outcome among refugees can be varied. Some researchers suggest forced migration could negatively impact the psychological well-being of the person, and put the individual at risk of mental disorders, such as PTSD (Leopold & Harrell-Bond, 1994; Lindencrona, Ekblad, & Hauff, 2008; Littleton, Axsom & Grills-Taquechel, 2011). In addition to the researches who suggest that in the face of hardship some refugees experience positive outcome by being able to overcome adversity, such as developing strength and positive coping strategies (Ai, Tice, Whitsetts, Ishisaka, & Chim, 2007; Antonovsky, 1993; Berger & Weiss, 2002; Limón & Halling,
Many researchers have suggested that refugee populations are psychologically more vulnerable than the general population due to poverty, discrimination and possible exposure to trauma during their journey; therefore, they tend to suffer more from negative mental health outcome such as depression, substance abuse, and risky sexual behavior (Blake, Ledsky, Goodenow & O’Donell, 2001; Hohmann & Shear, 2002; Kinzie, 2000; Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). Gerritsen et al. (2006) conducted a study on 410 refugees and asylum seekers living in Netherland from Afghanistan, Iran, and Somali to examine their use of health care system in Netherland. The study concluded that in general asylum seekers and refugees are more in need for using health care system due to their physical and mental health issues compare to immigrant and general population. The researchers concluded that there are differences in the usage of mental health services among different ethnic groups; some ethnic group tends to utilize health care services more than the others. In the same study, researchers suggested that less usage of health care by refugees in comparison to general population may related to limited access to care, their cultural view toward mental health, and language barrier.

In a quantitative study by Fredrick, Ekblad, and Hauff, the different types of stress and trauma exposure to refugees before and after migration was measured in order to understand the impact of pre-migration trauma on the mental health of 124 Middle Eastern refugees (2008). The study concluded that intense trauma pre-migration, such as torture, exposure to war may negatively affect the capacity of the person to handle stress and increase the risk of ones mental illness; however, post-migration stresses were not significant in this study (Fredrick, Ekblad, & Hauff, 2008). Yet, in another study the
researchers evaluated the role of pre- and postmigration in 70 adult Burmese refugees’ mental health living in Australia; they concluded the exposure to traumatic event had an impact on participant well-being, but post-migration difficulty was a greater predictor for mental illness among refugees (Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2010). The current study could be helpful in order to learn about the emotional experience of refugees who might potentially suppress their negative feelings. This population may experience psychological distress such as depression, anxiety and PTSD symptoms caused by maladaptive coping mechanisms (Snyder, 2001). On the other hand, some participants may demonstrate positive outcomes as a result of the stressful migration process, such as increased resiliency and PTG (Linly & Joseph, 2004). A research study on Kosovar refugees acknowledged the existence of both PTG and PTSD independently in its participants; however, those with higher levels of hope used more cognitive coping, resulting in higher PTG (Ai, Tice, Whitsett, Ishisaka, & Chim, 2007). According to Linly and Joseph (2004), the important factors in PTG include: the way an individual appraises stress, using emotionally focused coping, using spirituality to be more optimistic and self-efficacious, and maximizing social support.

Refugees represent a vulnerable population since they have lived with a feeling of fear and terror on a daily basis during their migration journey. It is valuable to have solid research results because every person depending on their unique personality, ethnic background and culture deals with the issue differently; especially considering the reported population of refugees around the world is above 40 million people (UNHCR, 2011).
Resources for Refugees

Prevention and effective intervention for mental and physical health for vulnerable populations such refugees have had a major role in creating a healthier and safer society in United States (Weine, 2011). In mentioned study on Bosnian refugees Weine suggested that there were a great number of participants who never seek psychological help however they met the criteria for PTSD since they are less focus on their illness and help seeking than other group of participants who seek mental health help. Weine argued that among refugees who are not seeking psychological help the importance of fulfilling their daily obligations such as job is far more important than managing their psychological suffering. However, Weine mentioned that it is not well clear the not seeking psychological help is related to their ego strengths, traumatic coping style, family support, social network; lack of readiness, or insight to their psychological problems.

Weine (2011) emphasized the importance of increasing public education toward ethnocultural barrier, multifamily support, proper training for health care professionals; however, it is important to maximize the accessibility and compatibility of any program for the refugee population. Weine (2011) argued that one of the aims of the intervention should be on increasing the knowledge of refugee families based on their culture and strength and help them to build trust toward service organization; another helpful intervention is to provide access to those educational program (e.g., providing weekend meeting, transportation, and childcare). Weine and his colleague (2008) mentioned that his research on several refugee population in United States showed ethnicity, culture, and social context are important elements on the optimal intervention development. For
example, development of program Coffee and Family Education and Support (CAFES) aimed to create a family atmosphere and assist families to talk about difficult and sensitive subjects (Weine, et al., 2008). There are many programs around the United States that have adopted a prevention approach for minorities (e.g., African-American Families, Latino Families) although there are not many programs designated for refugees’ mental health prevention (Weine, 2011). Moreover, the programs that are designed to help refugees are generally focused on one specific problem, such as War Trauma Recovery Project, Survivors of Torture International, Project for Immigrant & Refugees Surviving Torture and Cross Cultural Counseling Center. Researchers suggested that there are many refugees who are in need of mental health services but they do not seek help due to the lack of proper services, cultural barriers (Saechao et al. 2012). Weine (2011) argued that the outcome of intervention approach can be beneficial for even those refugees who do not reach out for help. Majority of the programs mentioned earlier are design to help survivals of torture in general, however some study showed that people from different country may have different response to exposure to trauma. For instance, Moisander and Edston, (2003) conducted a study on 160 participants from six different countries who experienced severe trauma during premigration phase. The result of the study showed the degree of negative psychiatric outcome is different between each group (Moisander, & Edston, 2003); therefore, it is beneficial to understand the cultural nuances in each culture and their unique personal experience in a deeper level. Weine argued that in order to create an effective prevention and effective intervention for refugees’ population, it is important to first understand the population from a different perspective, such as through culture and social context (2011).
**Trauma and Negative Outcomes**

Much of the research on trauma has focused on the western society’s experience of trauma, which is different from nonwestern refugees’ experience of trauma (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1995). Many models for treatment, such as trauma-focused CBT is based on western research on PTSD, which involves traumatic events such as motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters and assaults (Nickerson, et al, 2011). However, refugees who have experienced violations of human rights may need a deeper or different understanding of the nature of their experience. Weine (2011) argued that many trauma studies took place in a controlled environment, however refugees’ experience and their background are very unique due their culture and the country of origin. On the other hand, most of the time refugees’ are labeled as a traumatized population, which requires focusing on PTSD (Miller, 2003). The author proposed a holistic model that includes PTSD as part of one’s experience rather than as a major outcome of their journey. The majority of mental health professionals who work with this population are too focused on PTSD, which could be psychologically damaging to the person as whole (Miller, 2003). Thus, this type of approach has the tendency to medicalize and pathologize human suffering. Papadopoulos (2007) identified three major negative outcome in traumatic events; ordinary human suffering (OHS), distressful psychological reaction (DPR), and psychiatric disorder (PD). OHS in the face of tragic situation can be overcome with sufficient psychological health and proper support system (Papadopoulos, 2007). DRP is more intense experience of suffering and discomfort, and still can be overcome by the individual’s resiliency. Papadopoulos (2007) suggested before jumping into the conclusion of trauma equal PTSD it is important to consider negative effect of trauma as
psychological injury which is not always result in PTSD. PD is the most severe result of adversity, which exceeds the psychological capacity of the individual, leading to PTSD the most common outcome of PD and requires professional help (Papadopoulos, 2007).

According to the study by Gerritsen et al., (2006), rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD are higher among the Iranian refugees living in Netherlands as compared to other refugees from Afghanistan and Somalia. The high rate among Iranian refugees could be related to their exposure to premigration trauma, however, it is unclear the level of cultural acceptance toward seeking mental health care among other refugees’ ethnic group. The researchers identified a lack of trust among refugees from Somalia toward Dutch health care system that may have a role in lowering rate of reported mental health illnesses (Gerritsen et al., 2006). Other researchers suggested prevalence of mental health problem among refugees is much higher than the prevalence of utilizing mental health services in the United Kingdom (McCrone et al., 2005). According to Weine (2000), up to 70% of Bosnian refugees in Chicago who did not get proper mental health treatment had symptoms of PTSD. This finding may suggest the role of cultural appropriateness for seeking and utilizing mental health services in addition to limited proper mental health treatment for refugee population (Weine, 2000). Among refugees it is far more important to fit into the new society than be concerned or even pay attention to the possible psychological impacts of their past traumatic experience (Silove, 1999). Also, when comparing voluntarily migrated and forcibly migrated refugees, those who were forced to leave their country of origin show greater psychological impairment such as depression, anxiety and PTSD (Djuretic, Crawford, & Weaver, 2007). Another strong predictor for depression and PTSD symptoms is lack of proper social support among refugee
population due to the loss of familiar community as a result of migration (Keyes & Kane, 2004). On the other hand, in another study researchers concluded that experiencing intense trauma during pre-migration, such as torture, and exposure to war may negatively affect the capacity of the person to handle stress while increasing the risk of one’s mental illness (Fredrick, Ekblad, & Hauff, 2008).

The psychological impact of forced migration among refugees can vary from one individual to another. There could be many factors negatively influencing an outcome such as exposure to torture, war, major losses, and lack of support throughout the migratory process.

**Loss of Belongings/Identity**

Belonging refers to a sense of connection and involvement to the surrounding environment. The feeling of being fit and valued through shared characters within the social system (Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). Loss is a sense of detachment from one’s belongings (Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996; Keyes and Kane, 2004).

Detachment from belongings can be a painful experience for an individual. In the process of forced migration a person may experience tremendous losses that may shatter the sense of security and confidence in the world, which can affect one’s decision making (Murray, 2001). The world can be an unpredictable and unreliable place for those who experience major losses such as their loved ones, traditions, native language, values, social status, significant relationship, financial security, familiar pattern of being and safety that is the direct experience of many immigrants (Akhtar, 2001; Litjmaer, 2001; Marlin, 1994; Yaglom, 1993). People react differently to loss: Some deny their inner injury in order to avoid pain, and some cling to loss with chronic grieving and
idealization of their cultural loss by rejecting the host culture and leads them to isolation. However, some individuals go through the mourning process for their losses; mourning may works toward more effective coping with losses by helping the individual to find an emotional place for the losses within self (Root & Exline, 2014). According to continuing bonds model of mourning, the person keeps an ongoing inner relationship with one’s losses (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1992). The process of mourning may facilitate the individual to reach a new understanding of one’s new life that is integrated with the individual’s loss elements (Henry, Stiles, & Biran, 2005). In the process of forced migration people cope with many losses and the way they process sense of loss could have a role in the outcome of their adjustment and eventually their acculturation.

In the process of acculturation people go through different phases. Winkelman (1994) described four major phases involved with acculturation. At first some people experience a honeymoon phase; the individual wants to explore the new environment. Usually in the second phase, the exposure to a new environment can be stressful and one’s can experience a cultural shock. Life does not make sense anymore therefore the individual may experience confusion, helplessness, and lack of control over one’s life which may lead to negative emotional outcome such as depression. Gradually, people enter the next phase of adjustment, reorientation, and recovery. In this phase most people find a way to adjust to new life by using various coping skills; some may adjust by fighting or going toward isolation in the new culture, other may use their strength and problem-solving skills to move forward. The acculturation phase is only being achieved by those who were able to effectively pass previous phase and develop a stable adaptation.
to the new culture by using finding their new identity (Winkelman, 1994). This process plays a major role in the life of refugees, including the attitude of help seeking.

Keyes and Kane (2004) conducted a qualitative study on Bosnian refugees living in the United States in which they outlined some major concepts of the refugee experience. The major themes identified in the study included: belonging and adapting. Belonging defined as “where and when ones does or does not belong”; belonging has a great role in individual’s survival and well being (Keyes & Kane, 2004, p. 815). For instance, “belonging to old home” refers to the Bosnian’s memory of being part their society before war, that they had different beliefs yet tended to consider each other as the same blood with a common identity (Keys & Kane, 2004). Contrary to common belief, these refugees no longer fit into their homeland society (Keys & Kane, 2004). The concept described above is not applicable to Iranian refugees since Iran did not undergo major cultural changes after revolution and war. The concept of ‘empathy and reciprocity’ refers to the emotional hardships endured by Bosnian refugees in leaving behind their old culture and makes a connection with people in their new home (Keys & Kane, 2004, p. 816). Another example is “belonging in the new home,” refers to the difficult process of acculturation and adjustment a refugee experiences in the new home (Keys & Kane, 2004, p. 818).

The concept of Adapting was defined as ways ones cope with losses, memories, cultural transition, and language barrier. The researchers suggested that to concepts of belonging and adapting are interconnected; before war belonging to old home meant safety and commonness to Bosnian refugees however belonging to new home was painful for them through experiencing multiple losses and cultural shock. They adapted to new
home by changing themselves. The researchers suggested that these Bosnian refugees experienced both negative and positive feelings in the process of coping with their forced migration. Negative feelings such as: “culture shock, loneliness, and feelings of rejection, humiliation, and inferiority as well as psychic numbness, grief, nostalgia, and feeling as if they belonged to nowhere” (Keys & Kane, 2004, p. 825). However, they were able to experience free life without constant fear of death in their new home and hope for a better future (Keys & Kane, 2004).

In a qualitative study of the mental health of refugees living in the United Kingdom from Yugoslavia, it was suggested that keeping regular contact with family and friends, even without physical closeness, promoted a sense of belonging and mental health for most participants. One of the participants mentioned, “As it was not only about venting your frustration but about being what you are and being accepted for” (Djuretic, Crawford, & Weaver 2007). Similarly, Keyes and Kane (2004) conducted a phenomenological study that examined the loss of belongings among female Bosnian refugees living in the United States. Before the war, Bosnians had a united society or “brotherhood” that lived together, regardless of their religious background; however, after the war, people who did not belong to the same religious background fell apart and fought with each other, ultimately making it unbearable and unsafe for some religious groups to live in the same country. For Iranian-American refugees, the experience of loss is more about not being able to live in Iran safely due to constructed law from the government not being harmed or disrespected from other people in the society (Bozorgmehr, 1996).
In general, refugees might be dealing with some existing psychological issues like anyone can suffer from, however, the culture of origin of immigrants may have an important role for rejecting utilizing mental health. The researchers suggested that many immigrants avoid seeking mental health because of the stigma around mental health in their culture of their origin. Saechao et al. (2012) concluded that among first generation immigrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds using mental health services is not appropriate; 64% of the participants mentioned that in the many nonwestern culture using mental health services is not acceptable, it means “you are crazy.” Among first generation immigrants lack of presence of mental health services in their native country make it harder for them to seek help. The researchers suggest the role of public education, accessible culturally appropriate mental health services, and affordable care is crucial for immigrants to be enable them for having a healthy adjustment process in the new society (Saechao et al., 2012).

**Coping Mechanisms**

Coping is defined as a person’s cognitive ability to deal with stressful situation when the transaction between person and environment exceeding the person’s resources (Folkman et al., 1986). According to Lazarus (1966), an individual experiences stress when he/she perceives the self as incapable of adequately coping with a situation in which there is a threat to his/her well being or safety. According to Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, and DeLongis (1986), In the case of a traumatic event, an individual first goes through a primary appraisal, in which the person makes sense of the stressor by evaluating the situation as being threatening, challenging, harmful or causing loss to self or loved ones. In the secondary appraisal, the individual then decides if he/she can do
The individual’s unique way of approaching this primary and secondary appraisal process determines how the individual copes with a stressful situation. According to Folkman et al. (1986), there are two major types of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In the problem-focused approach, the individual uses an environmentally directed strategy, in which they use surrounding environmental resources to alter the stressful situation through problem solving; in the emotion-focused approach, the individual uses internal, emotional resources such as self-distancing, self-control, using socioemotional support, or escape/avoidance of the stressful situation (Folkman et al., 1986). Alternatively, Snyder (2001) described the coping process in two directions, proactive and avoidance approaches. Similarly, Moos & Schaefer (1993) divided coping in two categories: approach coping and avoidance coping. Approach coping involves the ways that an individual logically analyzes a hostile situation, uses positive reappraisal, seeks support of others, and actively copes with the situation. Avoidance coping involves when an individual tries to invalidate the intensity of the problem, withdraws from the problem, and escapes unpleasant emotions (Moos, & Schaefer, 1993). Individual coping responses can be different, even when the stressor is the same and takes place outside of ones awareness (Snyder, 2001, p. 5). High level of stressors may push the person towards avoidance coping such as “denial numbness” (Snyder, 2001, p. 14). The concept of “denial numbness” involves a “psychological breathing space” for the individual facing the traumatic event in the short term; however, the avoidance coping approach can cause serious threat to individual’s psychological health in the long term (Snyder, 2001, p. 14). In Snyder’s (2001) model, when individual submits to reactive avoidance strategies that
take place outside conscious level, it can increase the chance of paradoxical hyperattention, intensified self-focus, and disruptive thoughts and emotions (Snyder, 2001, p. 6). Hyperattention can be the result of cognitively avoiding and suppressing unpleasant thoughts about the stressor (Snyder, 2001, p. 12). Attending to avoidant path also can produce exaggerated self-focus on one’s failure to respond effectively to the stressor which may increase the individual’s awareness to related symptoms. Therefore, increased disruptive thoughts and emotions can be the outcome of both negative self-focus and hyperattention since they both can evoke negative thoughts and feelings (Snyder, 2001, p. 13). In Keyes and Kane’s (2004) study of Bosnian refugees, coping consisted of dealing with transition, memories, losses, accepting new culture and language barrier. Some of the coping mechanisms mentioned by the participants was practiced through numbness, denial, changing the whole attitude toward hardship and loss. For instance, in the same study one of the participants stated:

For me, anything that happened before doesn’t matter anymore, because everything I loved is gone, totally destroyed at home. It is true that coming here was a big change for me, but it is not so big a deal now. Nothing new can shock me. We already went through so many horrible things with the war, that nothing can shock me now. (Keyes & Kane, 2004, p. 823)

It is important to remember that people are diverse in their response to traumatic events; some individuals can overcome the stress and even experience stress-related growth (Snyder, 2001, p. 18). Miller (2003) argued that human strength is often illustrated in negative life events such as losses. According to the same study, many individuals who experienced hardship and major loss reported greater self-worth after
realizing they were able to get through the situation. In contrast, some individuals developed depression, anxiety or substance abuse (Miller, 2003). Stress-related growth explained by Snyder (2001, P. 18) as ability of a person to cope with stressor and using the experience for psychological growth. Undoubtedly, there are refugees capable of initiating positive behaviors in the face of inhuman conditions and have become strengthened by their particular exposure to adversity (Miller, 2003 & Papadopoulos, 2007). However, the majority of refugees who were exposed to severe trauma, such as torture, may suffer from psychological injury which may lead to psychiatric disorder (Papadopoulos, 2007).

The result of a longitudinal study on a group of people who were exposed to mass shooting at Virginia Tech, suggested that maladaptive coping has a reciprocal relationship with psychological distress (Littleton, Axsom, & Grills-Taquechel, 2011). Maladaptive coping, such as avoidance and withdrawal, can be a strong predictor for depressive and anxious symptoms over the long term (Littleton et al., 2011). Littleton and colleagues (2011) argued that a coping strategy is a repetitive behavior, thus maladaptive coping may involve rumination of self-recrimination, negative self-focus thoughts, demoralization, and perpetuate a cycle of avoidance and withdrawal. In fact, Littleton’s and colleagues’ study suggested that maladaptive coping can be the result of PTSD symptoms, however maladaptive coping does not reciprocally predict PTSD symptoms. The same study also indicated that thinking about trauma at a conscious or controlled level as a byproduct of maladaptive coping, may not lead to re-experiencing or hyperarousal at the unconscious/uncontrolled level but instead may lead to greater overall distress and different types of impairment (Littleton et al., 2011).
Ghazinour, Richter, & Eisemann (2004) found quality of life was heavily related to sense of coherence, coping resources, and social support among Iranian refugees who resettled in Sweden. Antonovsky (1993) defined a sense of coherence as a person’s capacity to view life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful. The individuals who have strong sense of coherence tend to have a higher ability to manage stressful situation and stay healthy in different stressful situations (Antonovsky, 1987). For a successful coping the person needs to understand the stressful situation while accessing the useful resources to deal with adversity (Antonovsky, 1993). Social support is defined as the availability of help in the person’s time of need (Ghazinour et al., 2004). The study suggested Coping resources, sense of coherence, and social integration could expand an individual’s capacity to cope efficiently with trauma, also act as protective factor against psychological disturbance (Ghazinour et al., 2004). A meta-analysis on Middle East’s refugees suggested that one’s ability to perceive life as meaningful and manageable could act as a buffer to common mental health disorder and PTSD symptoms (Lindencrona, Ekblad, & Hauff, 2007). However, in the same study researcher suggested that severe exposure to trauma can reduce individual’s capacity to handle stress over time (Lindencrona, Ekblad, & Hauff, 2007).

**Resiliency**

Resiliency is defined as the ability of the person to overcome traumatic event and bounce back to positive psychological state (Lenett, Brough & Cox, 2013; Bonanno et al., 2011; Riley & Masten, 2005). There are some individuals who demonstrate resiliency, and are able to experience a stressful situation and pass through it without major or permanent psychological damage. O’Leary and Icovikes (1995) conceptualized
resilience in creating the resilience and thriving model. The resilience and thriving model has three levels: survival, recovery, and thriving. In traumatic events an individual is confronted with a stressful situation that is beyond their psychological resources and they experience a decline in their level of normal functioning, or their “baseline.” Some individuals barely survive and may not be able to regain their baseline functioning; other individuals can reach the recovery level and return to their normal level of functioning prior to the adversity. However, some people not only can regain their baseline level of functioning, but also pass this level and reach a higher new level of functioning, or “thriving”. The thriving level is beyond the baseline functioning, and is the result of personal growth followed by adversity (O’Leary & Icovikes, 1995).

Ungar (2007) argued that resiliency is not only an individual’s ability to bounce back in the face of adversity, but also refers to the day-to-day process of solving problems and overcoming daily challenges in relation to the environment. Ungar (2007) emphasized the importance of the environment’s capacity to provide an individual with proper access to nurturing and culturally appropriate resources in order to activate resiliency in the individuals who previously faced adversity. Ungar (2012) mentioned resiliency got so much attention in refugees’ literature because it can help to depathologize the experience of refugees. Moreover, Ungar (2012) suggested that it is important to avoid limiting resiliency to individual’s inner capacity and not to ignore the possibility of resiliency being a social phenomenon in addition to inner capacity of the person. Braun-Lewensohn and Sagy (2014) conducted a study on Israeli urban and communal residents’ who were exposed to missiles attacks. The researchers recognized some of the factors that contributed to urban and communal residents different respond to
stress (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagi, 2014). They argued that communal residents showed
greater level of resiliency than urban residents in respond to acute stress due to
appropriate social support and community resources available in rural community. The
researchers concluded that social support and community resources could be considered
as protective factor in the face of adversity (Berger & Weiss, 2002).

Lenette, Brough, and Cox (2013) conducted a qualitative study on women
refugees in Australia to examine their resiliency in relation to their environment. The
researchers focused on three aspect of resilience in everyday life of their participants:
resiliency in normal life routine, role of resiliency in every day achievement over time,
and social complexity of resilience and stress. Resiliency in normal life routine was
described as the ability of the individual to overcome multiple daily challenges, such as
expectation of employers, the community and leaders. For instance, one of the
participants mentioned:

It was not easy to adjust to the new environment in Australia. I took some
time to know how systems function and to fit in my new environment. My
past experience of struggling helped me a lot to overcome the challenges
here. (Lenette, Brough & Cox, 2013 p. 645)

In the same study, everyday achievement of resilience in refugees’ life was described as
the process of experiencing accomplishment over and over; during this process giving up
was not an option and it was part of each participant’s everyday reality; however, looking
at resiliency as an ongoing daily process challenges the predefined outcome of resilient
versus nonresilient. Through every day achievements, one can experience the positive
outcome of resiliency even through a minor accomplishment. The researcher concluded
that resiliency for the participants was more than moving on with the past experience of adversity; it was dealing with constant challenges while they were adapting with continuous changes they were facing in their new home (Lenette, Brough & Cox, 2013).

Resiliency is a multilevel and complex process and it is hard to understand or predict resiliency without in-depth studying of the pathway of wellbeing in the group of people who experienced adversity in the same context (Uger, 2012). The researcher argued that from a cultural standpoint it is more beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of resiliency in qualitative process. In majority of western studies on resiliency researchers use western standardized form of measurement, however culture has a great role in individual’s resiliency, therefore it is important to understand the individual response to adversity (Miller, 2003).

Miller (2003) suggested that it is not appropriate to assume that certain external events are traumatizing to everyone. It is more appropriate to change the label of “traumatizing experience” to “traumatic events” since it is being commonly recognized and labeled in the society (Papadopoulos, 2007). In order to prevent the wrong assumption of whoever face sever adversity is traumatized by that experience (Papadopoulos, 2007). An individual’s response to hardship is not limited to traumatization, and an individual may demonstrate resilience or even experience a personal growth, such as Adversity-Activated Development (AAD, Papadopoulos, 2007). The difference between resilience and AAD is that with resilience the person’s ability to function stays the same as before being exposed to a traumatic event, whereas with AAD an individual may incorporate additional positive changes such as re-evaluating life, changing life style, and updating new values (Papadopoulos, 2007). A person with a good
psychological immune system is able to digest adversity within the context of a healthy meaning of life and proper support system (Snyder, 2001).

Overall, some refugees suffer from negative emotional impact of the forced migration which put them in a vulnerable position in their new life, however, some refugees can overcome the intense experience of their journey and gain personal strength and new coping skills to face the challenges on their path of adjusting with their new home. It is important to understand the elements that pay a role for safer process of migration in addition to maximizing refugees’ needs for thriving in their new life. The host society can have a great role to maximize the ability to cope among refugee population by providing culturally appropriate resources and support. These people have unique cultural background therefore they may use various coping mechanism to deal with postmigration stressors that may be the most culturally effective way for them to cope.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the current study was to use a phenomenological approach for data gathering and analysis, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant’s unique experience. The focus of this chapter was to outline the research methods used in the study, which explored the psychological impact of immigration on Iranian-Americans who were forced to escape Iran. This chapter covers the following topics: selection of participants, a description of the instrumentation, the overall research design including the study procedure, step-by-step description of data collection and data analysis techniques. Additionally, the assumptions and limitations of the methodology used in the study would be discussed.
Selection of Participants

This study included of six Iranian-Americans men who fled Iran between 1980 and 1985. All participants were male because the number of men in the normal population who escaped the country was much greater than the number of women (men fled the avoid due the mandatory military conscription for men during Iran-Iraqi war). The participants included in the study would represent a convenience sample.

Description of Instrumentation

In this study, the participants were administered a demographic questionnaire before being interviewed. The questionnaire asked participants about their education level, age, gender, employment status, occupation, and spiritual practices.

Participants then received a background questionnaire, which asked them for general information about their escape from Iran: the date of departure, their age at the time, the reason they left, their marital and family status, and their social support.

Participants were then interviewed about fleeing Iran using open-ended questions about its emotional impact and how they coped. The interview questions are outlined below.

1. Tell me about when you first learned or realized you may need to leave your country? What was your first reaction, feelings? What was happening in your life, family, and friends?
2. Tell me about your decision to leave.
3. Tell me about the last few days prior to the departure?
4. Please tell me the story of your journey?
5. How did you picture your future when you wanted to leave the country?
6. How did this experience affect your personal and professional life?

7. What is your emotional experience when you think back of the journey?
   What kinds emotional impacts then and now?

8. How do you generally cope with stress on a daily base?
   What has been helpful?

9. Is there any thing you would like to add?

The rationale for each of the interview questions is being explained in this section. For instance, one of the interview questions on the list was intended to reveal the motivation behind the participant’s course of action, such as regard for political affiliation, religion, and war; this information helped to fit each participant into a specific subcategory. It is important to consider each participant’s reason for escaping the country in order to evaluate the intensity of his experience. The question was, tell me about your decision to leave. Interview questions were also designed to determine the intensity of the immigration experience, such as, loss of belonging. The human search for belonging has been studied by numerous scientists and researchers as fundamental to human survival and well-being (Keyes & Kane, 2004). The degree of loss was further examined by asking the question, tell me bout the last few days prior to the departure. By asking the question—What is your emotional experience when you think back of the journey? What kinds emotional impact then and now? Knowing more about the refugees’ mental health situation gave a better picture on how to reduce their suffering, especially for those whose condition has remained untreated. The participant established a baseline about her/his expectations of life by answering the following question: How did you picture your future when you wanted to leave the country? In addition, the following questions—
How do you generally cope with stress on a daily base? Another question was used to examine the coping style of each participant: How did this experience affect your personal and professional life?

**Procedures**

The participants in the current study were collected on a volunteer basis from Iranian-American gathering such as concerts, cultural centers, religious groups, cultural events (e.g., Persian New Year). The volunteers were contacted by phone and given an explanation of the study. If participants wanted to continue, they were given an appointment based on their convenience for the one-hour interview. Participants were given the choice to meet the researcher at their home or at a local counseling office. Participants were given the option to be interviewed at home because the nature of interview involves discussing emotional and potentially sensitive information; a home environment may provide comfort, privacy, and security for some subjects. A private local counseling office was also offered to subjects for the interview if they preferred to discuss the sensitive interview information in private and anonymous location. Additionally, a home environment may contain belonging that trigger specific memories of the migration experience for participants, so an anonymous location may be preferable in these cases.

Each interview session began with an explanation of the study and the informed consent form. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any obligation. Participants then were administered the demographic questionnaire and the background questionnaire. Then, participants were administered the interview protocol, and the interview was audio recorded for word-by-word transcription.
Audio recordings were secured in confidential location, separate from identifying information.

**Data Processing Techniques**

This study utilized a phenomenological approach. Data processing in a phenomenological study involved identifying major theme in participant’s responded that represented major concept of their experience. Moustakas (1994) suggested the process of identifying major themes involved several steps: the first step of the process was bracketing, or removing the researcher’s perceptions and beliefs regarding the phenomenon from the process by stepping back and re-evaluating personal views (Moustakas, 1994). The next step was to identify phrases or concepts that were relevant to the research question, in a process called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). The following step involved reduction and elimination, in which the phrases and concepts that were not related to the essence of the phenomena were reduced and excluded. Next, the researcher engaged in clustering and thematizing, identifying and collecting the phrases, concepts, and themes that were commonly used among participant in order to investigate the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Subsequently, validation was the process in which precise themes and concepts were reviewed for relevant patterns in addition to irrelevant themes; the relevant themes merged and the irrelevant themes were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Next, in individual textural description the researcher summarized each participant’s unique experience in terms of his or her perceptions, concerns, and intuitions. The individual structural description followed, and was a reflective reference of the phenomenon based on description and imaginative differences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). The last step was composite description, which involved integrating the
participants’ description and understanding about the phenomenon in the universal form (Moustakas, 1994). In this qualitative study, the researcher reached the point of saturation after the concept became solid and valuable.

**Methodological Assumptions and Limitations**

In this study, a phenomenological model was used in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). In phenomenological exploration, an analyst searches for the core of meaning through individual portrayals of their experience in the context of phenomenon “seeing how one sees the world”. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). Around 1900, Edmund Husserl established phenomenology with an attention on human consciousness and experience, however he later expanded the concept to incorporate the human-life viewpoint (Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002). A phenomenological approach inside qualitative research serves to give a clear premise to human experience in relation to feelings and often explores complicated human experiences (Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002). Phenomenology is characterized as the investigation of individuals' conscious knowledge of their life experience through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2009). Finlay (2014) described it as, “Phenomenology champions a holistic nondualist approach to life, and this philosophy needs to be mirrored in its methodology” (Finlay, 2014). This type of research is a way to go beyond what is already known as established knowledge or through experience (Finlay, 2014). The research represents a unique attitude, which is remains open to new possibilities and understandings. Thus, this attitude differentiates phenomenology from other research approaches focused on exploring experience and subjectivity (Finlay, 2008, 2013).
Ethical Assurances

In the presented study, numerous steps were taken to ensure adherence to the ethical standards and ethical treatment of research subjects as outlined by the American Psychological Association. More specifically, all research participants were given an informed consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, confidentiality assurance, and disclosure of any risks involved. This form was thoroughly explained to the subjects in both English and Farsi, and the written form was also available in both languages. In the informed consent, subjects were reminded that their participation in the study is voluntary, and they are free to withdraw their participation from the study at any time.

Additionally, the current study’s procedures were designed to protect the confidentiality of the subjects as much as possible. After interviews with subjects were recorded, the researcher identified the subject with a number, rather than a name or any identifying information. Subject names and their corresponding numbers kept on a single master list that is stored separately from the interview data and recordings. After, subject’s interviews were transcribed, the original recordings were kept in on a flash drive and stored in the researcher’s personal safe deposit box at Bank of America, separate from the identifying information, and the transcriptions were also be kept in a password protected file on my personal computer which is also protected with another password. The consent forms were kept separately in another personal safe deposit box at a Wells Fargo Bank.

The nature of the current study involved interviewing participants about a stressful event in their lives, therefore a risk inherently involved in the study was the potential to emotional upset while discussing emotionally-charged biographical
information about their experiences. Participants of this study escaped the borders of Iran over thirty years ago however it was possible that PTSD was something they may suffer from at the time of their transition. The researcher believed there was enough distance between the times of their move to United States and the interview. The risk of anxiety, re-living some negative emotions, or flash back during or after interview was there but the risk was much less as if they were just arrived. The current study’s participants were provided with counseling resources that they could utilize to minimize the risk involved in the study. There was no anticipated political risk for the participants: (a) Their identification was absolutely protected and confidential; (b) All the identifying information from the interview was eliminated; (c) All political statements were excluded from the study since this research was solely psychological not political by any means. Additionally there were some potential of benefits were involved in this study. In fact, study Weine (2011) suggested that one the effective way to understand the resiliency within refugee population is using minimally structured interviews. Shamai (2003) argued that process of qualitative interview could have a healing effect on participant due to the space is being created for participant to reflect on his or her lived experience. The researcher conducted the current study to provide a better cultural understanding of Iranian-American refugees’ experience.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Demographics

The participants in the study were all Iranian-American men who escaped Iran and were living in United States at the time of study. All were professionals in different fields such as medicine, psychology, engineering, and music. Participants left Iran
between 1982-1985, when they were 17-32 years old. Four escaped with family members and two escaped alone. It took an average of 4 days to get past the borders of Iran.

**Summary of Themes**

Six main domains emerged while trying to understand the lived experiences of the participants on the journey, including its emotional impact and how they coped. Data analysis yielded 6 domains and 16 themes see Table 1.

The table on the following page summarizes the domains, themes, frequency, and participants’ name which appeared in the transcripts. Themes are listed under each category which also appeared in the transcripts. A list of categories along with their themes and the frequency that was used by each participant is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Categories and Themes of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain: Incentive to leave due to extreme social pressure</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political and civil unrest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>P2, P4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal opportunities to obtain resources</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious discrimination</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>P1, P3, P6</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain: Initial Emotional Response</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Excitement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbness</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain: Journey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Coping with physical and environmental discomfort</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domain: Experiencing Loss</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss from material detachment</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss from emotional detachment</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain: Experience Support on the path</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family and friends’ support</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangers’ support</td>
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<td>Organizations’ support</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain: Outcome</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional impact of the journey</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction in life</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. INCENTIVE TO LEAVE

In this domain participants described their experience of living in Iran under great amount of pressure. This domain is divided to three themes that illustrate a clear picture of participants experience under certain condition in their society.

**Theme 1: Political and civil unrest**

When trying to understand participants’ incentive to leave, common experience of political and civil unrest was one theme. In general, the turmoil as a result of post-revolution and war was the picture that emerged when they described their situation in
the society before they left Iran. Participants had experienced a direct threat, such as imprisonment and execution, which required them to flee their country.

P2: I was involved in political activities, and it was the time of detentions [of the opposition]. …we were active in a political party which was so under scrutiny of the government. I mean, I was sure! I was next. I have no doubt. Because most of the friends who got arrested where active at the same realm that I was active. It means that it was my turn to get caught.

P4: I was politically-minded and active and my political ideas did not go the same direction as the government of Iran and revolution. …I was in danger of being imprisoned and executed so, I left Iran. …The decision came after one very important imprisonment, in which district attorney, or the revolutionary government asked for my execution. This was serious. After a month staying in jail, I was waiting for my verdict and I didn’t know whether I was going to be executed or not. So that was very difficult.

Theme 2: Minimal opportunities to obtain resources

Participants explained their main motives for fleeing the country as being under unbearable socioeconomic pressure. They described the period before they left Iran as a time in which they were “deprived of all civil right,” “dark and grave,” full of “discrimination,” with “no rules no regulations,” in which they needed to utilize “gas coupons” and “food stamps.” All respondents explained their personal view on the social pressure they were experiencing before they made their decision to leave. They stated
their personal view on living in Iran and experiencing an unfamiliar situation in their own country without having any perception for their future. Participants generally experienced a great deal of frustration.

P1: My wife said, “I think your wasting your life here, there is no opportunity for your future here, I think you should go to the U.S and do some physics”.

P3: Mostly hectic everything was mixed up; there was no rule no regulation. …, so we didn’t have anybody to teach us, I ended up, working with one attending and seeing many patients, sometimes to 200–300 in half a day, so lot of pressure at work…The food stamps were required, we had to go in line to buy food, and the whole thing didn't show any good future.

P4: Then Iran ended up being an unknown place. Ended up being in some place I did not expect. It was like a dead end to me.

P5: I couldn’t really imagine myself to survive in the mood and environment that was dominant in there [Iran]… All guys who were close friends of mine from high school had left Iran in a way that I got lonely…so, what basically was supposed to be my cultural and intellectual ties were not there any more.

P6: Every day I come from work think about gas coupons for next day and how I get to work next day, small pieces…. On a daily bases there were things that you saw and things that happened that had some impact on your life; these things accumulated and pushed us over the edge.
Theme 3: Religious discrimination

Religious discrimination and persecution was commonly mentioned by participants who were members of none-Muslim communities, such as Baha’i and Judaism.

P1: I belong to a Baha’i family, although I wasn't Baha’i myself, I was deprived all civil rights. We couldn't get married, I was not officially married. I could not have a business, I could not go to school, and I couldn't own a property. See, the best you could have done was to be under the mercy of the government, even ordinary citizens, any body can do anything to you, you have no protection that way there was a big difference.

P3: They started to discriminate her, she [wife] was ICU and surgery nurse, and then they didn’t let her to touch the medications because of her religion [non-Muslim] they say you’re not allowed.

P6: The Baha'i community [participant’s community] in Shiraz was under a lot of pressure. Various arrest and so on, so community wise everybody was under some level of stress pressure. We, I couldn't go to college I was there then I was expelled for religious reasons, so all the possibility of country education was not there. The possibility of holding any need regular job that you can count on its continuity was not there you either work for a Baha’i’ friend or for a business man who's own business was private. We couldn't get legally married and it was hard…
2. INITIAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

Participants also described their emotional reactions when they started their journey. When they asked to describe their experiences in the last few days prior to departure (Initial emotional respond), Participants described their experience, as “excitement,” in addition to other participants as “stressful,” and “numbness” and “confusion” which became the emerging themes for this category.

Theme 1: Excitement

Some participants described their excitement for the adventure, mentioning that they were youth and it was like a movie for the possible dangers on the journey never crossed their minds. They described their first emotional respond to the process of escape as exciting and adventure-like type of experience. They were looking forward to experiencing the journey. They stated that they did not take it as serious as it was since they were not able to comprehend the actual danger.

P1: I was excited because I was doing it [escape] like an adventure.

P2: As if someone tells me let’s go have an ice cream… it seemed like a game to me or maybe it was supposed to happen this way. It felt very very normal to me… There was the feeling of excitement but not fear. I don’t know why. Maybe we were so young and we could not comprehend the consequences that follow. One thing that I am so sure about is that I wasn’t scared. I wasn’t scared at all. We really were not thinking about the dangers we could face along the way. At least I was like that and honestly I don’t think my cousins and my friends were anything different. I mean it was a seriously complicated path. However it really did not have such an
effect on us. Therefore we were so calm. I don’t know why!

**Theme 2: Stress**

The initial emotional respond to the escape was difficult and stressful for some of the participants. They find it stressful to be ignorant of what was going to happen. They also perceived it as a challenging and unknown path ahead of them.

P3: It was not easy for me because I was not thinking about leaving and I didn't know what’s going to happen, the whole thing was stressful… We were very nervous, we didn’t know what to do. We had to wait, standby; they told me, we gonna call you, then you have ten minutes [to get ready], you have to leave, there was no schedule, so we were waiting, waiting, waiting with the family and parents and a small kid

P4: Yeah, yeah…was very dramatic. Two days ago prior to our journey this group of people [smuggler] were arrested. So our passports were in the possession of the government authorities, our money in the possession of the smugglers who were in jail. So not only they were in trouble, they had our passports and we knew that they would come after us. We had to kind of stay with friends and stay hidden. Until we found other people [smugglers]. It took maybe 2-3 weeks. You didn’t know if they [government authorities] are going to come knock on the door and arrest you or, if you can get your stuff and leave Iran. So, it was very dramatic and it continued.

P6: It mostly really imagining every possible scenarios regarding something that we had very little information about... I would say it took a
good maybe three, four, five years, maybe initially thinking about the possibility to actually taking the steps to make it work. Towards the end really was this making sure you have everything and going over all possible scenarios; that's what going to happen and if this happened I do this and that.

**Theme 3: Numbness, confusion**

Some participants responded that the first emotional reaction toward the journey was confusion and numbness. They mentioned that it was hard for them to process and feel the path awaiting them.

P1: I was confused— I could not comprehend what’s happening… I didn’t show any reaction.

P5: There was a sensation of numbness. Sometimes that very good things and very bad things happened to me, I feel I can’t perceive it for a period of time and all of a sudden it hits me. It really was stressful, but wouldn’t be thinking what lies ahead of us [me]. The process of our trip got so long and complicated and finally the smuggler told me that tomorrow we are going to make the move.

3. **JOURNEY**

Participants described their journey as a long, complex and stressful process. Most of them experienced physical pain and extreme exhaustion. Participants explained how they had to be hidden while there were being transferred to different places.
Theme 1: Coping with physical and environmental discomfort

Participants were smuggled out of the country and most of them had to walk long distances and survive being on the road for many hours. They described an unbearable physical exhaustion and pain while they were on the road. All participants portrayed their own unique condition on the road and their individual way of trying to cope to overcome the rough condition on the route. A majority of the participants experienced a high level of discomfort in the escape process.

P1: I left the road and hit the mountain and then just followed the moon for direction. I walked for ten hours... It’s really difficult to hike at night partially if you don't have a trail to hike on; I was bush waking, there was no trail. So in the dark what happens is that you can't estimate well the distance from where you are to the ground, so when you put your feet down you could be off for half an inch, but when you do it for ten hours, every time you hit the ground at a wrong time when you don't expect it, so it messed up my knee for two years that one night. I had pain in my knees for two years. Also at some point, I got chased by dogs and I fell into a ditch and I got soaked in water and it was pretty uncomfortable.

P2: We kept going and going and I couldn’t take the pain any more…I was sitting on a horse holding on, and the saddle kept hitting me. My foot was all in pain… My thighs and legs were covered with chafing blisters and rashes from riding on the horse.

P3: Eventually they took us in the back a truck [hiding], and drove to the mountain and then afterward they said you have to walk and then we
walked about almost two three hours with a 15 months baby and ten other people… we stayed [hiding] in two, three houses. They [smugglers] moved us from one to another one and spend half a day or one day. It was very, very dirty, there was a bed that didn't have even one spot clean on it, it was so bad, the sheets were very old and dirty…

P4: So they [smugglers] drove us [on motorcycle] and we drove about 6 hours and I remember that we fell couple of times. My mother hurt her foot and the foot was never got ok… [silence, bursts into tears], poooff. . we got into the back of a pickup truck, they [smugglers] throw us some bread some bananas and that was it and we drove for 24 hours...we were running, so many days …

P5: Imagine something like 1x1x1 meter cube, nine people were there! I bended my knees into belly and put my head over my knees. There was a hole up there as a vent for air. We stayed there for 1 hour…we needed to go back to that small cubic area and hide. But this time I am not sure, but I think it took us around 2 hours to get there When I came out I was suffocating, couldn’t breathe, I couldn't comprehend my surrounding.  

P6: Then the three of us my wife and daughter and myself put a blanket on and waiting [for the car] and it was very, very cold I didn’t think or I was worried about my daughter may not survive it, so we kind of bundle her up with whatever we had, we laid down and hold her to keep her warm.
Theme 2: Coping with food and water deprivation

Some participants had to tolerate going without food and water for many hours. They mentioned that they did not know how long they could survive with very little amount of food and water.

P3: We were waiting for another car to come; and they didn’t show up so we were there for 24 hours without anything; we didn’t have any water, we didn’t have any food… then we got some water which was very dirty, she [wife] got sick, some kind of malaria or diarrhea or something very bad…They took us on the back of the truck and they drove us to Quetta and it took about eight hours-nine hours, after a few hours we were dead tired, they took us to a house and gave us a little bit of food and we were on the road again…

P4: So, we got into the pickup truck behind it, they throw us some bread some bananas and that was it and we drove for 24 hours.

P5: This journey was supposed to take around 8 hours, but the ship needed repair and it took us 36 hours. The food and water they had with them for us was just for 10 hours or so and after 10-12 hours we didn’t have any water. In the second day, a very hot day in month of August, in the middle of Persian Gulf…

Theme 2: Witnessing or Experiencing Threat to one’s Life or Safety

Generally, participants mentioned different types of fear. They mentioned being in situations in which they were scared of getting killed by strangers en route, or getting arrested by the authorities. Some participants passed through a dangerous situation right
after they realized how dangerous it was to be in that position. Participants explained a variety of fears on their respective journeys.

P1: I heard this guy shouting and I looked and I saw this soldier type, yelling, but he was yelling in Turkish and I didn't know if he was talking in Iran’s Turkish or Turkey’s Turkish I just kept walking fast and he was chasing me, he was yelling and screaming and I was just walking as fastest I could, let's cover some more distance to see what happens, so eventually he got to me and he was out of breath and obviously he was screaming obscenities at me, because I made him [soldier] to ran after me, and later I learned he could have shot me.

P2: We were supposed to change car and ride on another Jeep later but the Jeep [the car ahead of us] got caught by Sepah Pasdaran [the Revolutionary Guard]. My brother was behind the wheel. He made a quick turn right away. Myself, the smuggler, my brother, my cousin and my second cousin were sitting in this car. We hit the gas pedal and ran so fast… I began to feel worried, because first of all I was getting separated from all others and I was scared that he would be cutting my throat or something like that …

P3: In Kerman we were waiting for other family to join us they didn't show up so we went to a hotel to wait a few hours, we went to the hotel as soon as we checked in they got suspicious so I saw one of them calling to report to the police, immediately we ran and stopped a taxi and asked the driver to take us to Zahedan. We were scared that he was going to kill us,
because you couldn't trust anybody and there was no reason he [taxi driver] was doing it [offering to take them to his home], he should do it for money, and he never asked for money. They put in the back of a truck and moved, on the way, we saw a lot of Afghan people escaping and thank God they didn’t have any weapon and they didn't do anything to us.

P4: I asked the guy how come your guys were not here. The guy said: “well it is really scary where you were. Yesterday three people were killed here;” [laughter] this is where we were stuck; it was just the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan and Iran…They [smugglers] could have done anything to us, they had our money, they had our passports.

P5: A boat came right after our boat, and six people got suffocated and died. The person who brought them tried to dump them in the water but the bodies surfaced in the water. …You could have been one of them or you might have been deported back to Iran.

P6: There was a border patrol whoever they are, they started talking in loud speaker that you should stop there’s three or four of them in their car, and maybe they did a couple of warning shots that we should stop, and the driver just stepped on it and we started to going very, very fast. I didn't sit, my wife and our daughter did, I couldn't, I just had to hold myself down in the back of the truck or we were just fly out and the two of us [other guy] kind of leaned down and held the some chained which was holding the spare tier or something like that. And we heard a couple of other shots but
nothing more than that, and then we were going fast for I’d say maybe two hours…

4. EXPERIENCING LOSS

Participants talked about a common experience of leaving something important behind, and some of them experienced guilt for their losses. In addition, some of them expressed that they suffered form loss of identity in the process of emigrating from Iran. In the process of forced migration, participants experienced loosing everything that symbolized their past lives and attached them to their previous social roles and identities.

Theme 1: Loss from Material Detachment

Participants stated that they had to let go of all of their personal materials they had gathered in their lives which also had sentimental memories for them. In the manner that they had to leave the country they were forced to carry a small bag of personal possessions. Some of them lost the rest of their belongings on the route.

P1: The knife that I loved very much, they confiscated it or they wanted to confiscated and I said no you can't confiscate it

P4: Everything we had in Iran after all these years, ended up in a suitcase, so if we go with the motorcycle, suitcase has to become a backpack. We got rid of everything we had. We had small bags that you could carry on the motorcycles… We did that, we throw away what we had just small bags and yeah… yeah…we lost even our backpack and suitcases.

P6: we started gathering our stuff and selling almost everything before we leave, whatever we had. The rest was probably a good 80% or so of what we had with us which was my daughters stuff for the trip.
Theme 2: Loss from Emotional Detachment

Participants expressed a sense of loss they experienced during their migration. They mentioned that they experienced a feeling of “guilt” associated with their loss. They also talked about how they had to detach themselves from their past, in addition to the people they had leave behind.

P1: There was a sense of guilt associated with what I did, neglected. The guilt was mostly for my dog because I had to abandon my dog, I had a German Shepherd back in Iran. I didn't abandon him, I left him with my brother but it was my dog not my brother's dog and he did take a very good care of him, of my dog, but again it was my dog I abandoned my dog so that bothered me still bothers me, my dog has been dead many, many, decades ago. Also I left my grandmother again my brother took them, It wasn't like I dumped them my brother he was very much okay with it. …I have regret for leaving my dog and my grandmother behind.

P2: This [journey] both, have the happy feelings as well as the sense of guilt for leaving my friends behind. I got separated from my parents very soon. They were such a good parents; of course my mother is not with us anymore. But I have never had their guidance. …Since I needed to be alive I had to do this journey and the price was not having my parents with me.

P3: It was very difficult to think about leaving the country; I traveled outside the country but never thought to leave the country for good… I didn’t want to [leave] … I was dreaming to go back all the times, I still do.
P4: Whatever you call, survival guilt, I have lost friends in Iran and then the politically active community I was a member of, how I betrayed them I left them, I was disappointed, Then all the hopes I had for Iran and political movement all went to hell, so I have lost everything, I lost my future, I lost my girlfriend, my political ideas, everything. I had in mind that I prepared myself for whatever was gone, so I really couldn’t understand it, I couldn’t get it, I couldn’t deal with it.

P5: It was the time that even FA [best friend], has gone to abroad and since I have spent my high school years and college years with FA and some other guys, we never thought that one day we all be out. So what basically was supposed to be my cultural and intellectual ties were not there anymore. … I think the process of getting out of Iran, then the attempts for adaptability has destroyed something in me, has deleted my history, I have been cut off from the first 25 years of my life.[bursts into tears].

5. EXPERIENCE SUPPORT ON THE PATH

All participants were able to utilize some sort of support throughout their journey. The support some of the participants received was out of expectation since the people who helped them were strangers. One of the participants explained that strangers helped him as “pure service” without expecting any monetary compensation. Some of them had their family and friends support in the host country, or on the way of their immigration to the United States. The others were able to move on in a safer way through their path because of the support of those people on the route. Some of the participants talked about
religious organizations that took care of their immigration legal process and paper work. One participant mentioned that the support he received from the society in the United States helped him pass the adjustment process. For some of them going through the journey as a group was helpful and they were able to give each other emotional support in intense moments.

**Theme 1: Family and friends’ support**

Participants stated that they had some sort of support from their family members and friends on their journey. Some of them were able to stay with them and get their help to move forward before or after resettlement.

P1: I had the support system, when I was in Spain. I stayed with my uncle [in Spain] for five months. When I was in Spain, one of my old classmates heard that I was in Spain. He was at the time in U.S; he flow to Barcelona took me with him to Madrid to the U.S embassy. He went and talked to the ambassador and told him they needed to accelerate my process and they did it. …When I came here I had my friend and my sister, although she was having hard time at the time, herself, but she was my support.

P2: One important reason for it [not being scared] was that I was being accompanied by my cousin and my second cousin who were about the same age as me. In one way or another we made each other stronger.

We stayed in Italy for nine months with one of my cousins, who were living there back then, it was one of the best experiences that I have ever had in my life.
P4: There was one Jewish family that live in Karachi, and was this family... One Jewish family in Karachi, ... they took us home, only because we were Jewish and they were Jewish. They took us home they gave us food and all of that and they said no don’t go to [Portugal] you should go to Italy, Italy is good... Here [U.S.] we had family members and stuff, so that is how it was.

P6: we had some friend and relative of my wife [in Quetta]

Of course my sister had started contacting various agencies in States, office state, you whether she can expedite our work there was and definitely we wanted to come to the US fortunately US has the policy of finding the family which were scattered for some reason back to together so that being a Bahai’ helped our case.

**Theme 2: Strangers’ support**

Participants expressed their gratitude for the strangers on their way out of Iran who helped and supported them. They explained that there were surprised at how they went out of their way to help them. The received help in the least expected moments of their journey.

P2: We came to the village [on the route], everybody [people in the village] was greeting and serving us tea, bread, cheese, cream and things like that, as we were their special gusts.

It was hard to believe we are in the middle of our escape and we are being treated in a special way. ... We fell asleep very soon and in the morning
we had a wonderful breakfast including omelets and so many other things.
we got so much care and hospitality from the people in the village.
P3: …sometimes I think about the people [strangers] who were on our
journey, the people who helped us in our way, sometimes I think to go
back and work for them for a year. … That was a pure service, what they
did for us, I don’t know, maybe a miracle…
P4: We were supposed to leave in few hours we ended up staying there
over night and these people were so nice, they kind of treated us like kings
and queens, so we stayed there over night…They [smugglers] were so nice
to us and honest, how Iranian were those days,…they could have taken all
of money, you think we could stop them? They were so respectful so
nice…
P6: he [smuggler] was a very large man very rugged kind of person but
very kind, he apologized that he doesn't have anything for the baby my
daughter but he can not be here and he asked do you want some dinner we
said no we are fine we have some.

Theme 3: Organizations’ Support

Participants were able to utilize the organizational support before and after
resettlement in the United States. These organizations facilitated participants’ transition
into a faster and smoother process. Most of these organizations were religious
organizations such as Jewish and Baha’i that facilitated refugees’ needs.
P1: I came to United States I was resident immediately, I could go to
college and I was mostly treated with respect, Then I went to college,
…private and free and they took superb care of me, they really took me
like family and later took my family like family, took a good care of us.
P3: There was a Jewish organization in Spain, kind of religion
organization that they helped us to get religious asylum and move forward.
P4: we got our asylum with the help of a Jewish organization.
P6: there were Bahai’ refugees organization and we make contact with
them, went to the house [they provided] and they helped us in the process
of getting our refugee status.

6. OUTCOME

Participants verbalized their perception of their journey. They explained how they
found meaning of their experience. In addition, some of them stated their personal view
toward their current lifestyle.

Them 1: Emotional Impact of the Journey

Participants pointed out positive and negative affects of forced migration on their
lives. They also mentioned how this experience shaped their perception toward life. Some
of them mentioned that they never thought there was something that they could not do in
life. One participant explained the change of his mindset and the outcome of emigration
from Iran:

P1: But the thoughts never crossed my mind; it was completely obvious to
me that how its going to go. I am going to go, and I am going to cross and
nothing is going to happen. I guess maybe it gave me a false sense of
confidence, because even after that I’ve never thought that there was
something I couldn't do. I thought that was piece of cake, …if I want to do
it I can do it. So that actually might helped a lot. …Sense of pride because I did it so cool it was too cool to go alone. I am proud of the trip also, it took very, very, short time compare to most people. …I am very glad that I did it though, glad is not a right word, it was fundamental it would be complete life it would be totally different life so it turned out very, very well for me.

Participants explained their current lifestyle and the way forced migration has changed them in life.

P2: Well…now that I think of it, anything that happened to me here in the United States, was influenced by this experience. … For example I had to be the decision maker for my life. … However there were some very positive effects too. For example I was forced into think about my own self and do what I thought it was good for me. …And consequently professionally what it followed was that I became a musician. I realized I can’t be a doctor… Because I have always been a very emotional man, land this experience made my emotions even stronger… granted me a grave perception of a concept, and that concept was “migration”, being separated from family and being responsible for your own welfare. Anything that has ever happened to me and will be happening in future, this journey was the initiation point.

P6: I really, at that point, I didn’t think that there was anything, anything really in this world that I couldn’t do. Some of it comes from, you know, great amounts of energy and some of them come from ignorance, because
you don’t know what may occur. But, I think when we got here to the U.S.-- more or less, I had the same outlook.

Three participants (P2, P3, P4) pointed out some negative consequences of the forced migration that they had to overcome during their adjustment in the United States; however, most of them mentioned that the general outcome of their migration has been positive. Three participants described:

P2: For example I had to be the decision maker for my life. I was responsible for my wrong decisions the same as my correct decisions. One of the most important effects was that I got separated from my parents very soon. They were such a good parents…But I have never had their guidance.

P3: Well, I, you know I tried to focus and not to think about what happened it probably pushed me to work harder and think more about future, you know, …think about the family, how to make their life, and send them to school and all this things so probably pushed more to work harder and I was probably working about 24 hours a day for about three or four years after I finish my training.

P5: It is related to immigration because when you come out you need to survive and you need to compromise all these.

Only one participant (P5) stated that the pressure of the escape has damaged him emotionally and he has been overwhelmed by the negative affect of the experience.

P5: For such a long time, I used to have nightmare, in which I was back in Iran and I have to take this path one more time, gain not feeling secured.
These nightmares used to wake me up with intense fear. These nightmares last long, for more than 4-5 years, I had these nightmares, and I had these nightmares on and off, repeating over and over again.

He also mentioned:

It is almost something like that [the movie “Birdman”]. The image you have in your head about yourself and the things that is happening in reality is so different….I think that I have lost my root. I can’t find where that root is!

**Them 2: Life satisfaction**

The majority of the participants mentioned that hey have a good life and they were able to pursuit a desirable lifestyle. Most of them pointed out that they have developed effective strategies and skills to cope with stress on a daily bases. With the exception of one participant, all of them stated that their life is in a place that they always wanted to be.

P1: I became a professional because I went and finish school and worked for a big technical corporation so that change everything. Also change everything for my wife and my child obviously. My wife came here also became a very successful professional were as in Iran she would be a housewife basically. … I don't have stress. My life is pretty stress free.

P2: …I became a musician. I realized I can’t be a doctor…. Because I have always been a very emotional man, this experience made my emotions even stronger…I play music…I play music, I read poetry, I walk. I don’t like stress. I don’t think everybody really dislikes stress but I
do. It really bothers me even when another person gets stressed out. It might be my defense mechanism that has been developed through those days of solitude or that trip. But I really do my best not to get stressed out. I don’t know…may be the reason is that I don’t really think it would make any difference to what it is. Why being anxious?...

P3: I played music and exercised. When some thing happens I try to go to the bottom of the problem; if it is not a serious health problem, most likely every problem is going to be solved. I figured out, financial problems can be solved with money, money comes and goes. This is the way I look at it and I am trying to teach to other people, to the kids and the family and all. We’re lucky here! We have lot of people with same culture, language, and custom [Persian community]. If you like it, you go and become part of it [Persian community], if you don’t like you just live for yourself.

P4: Life is not easy, I know it is difficult, I know it is stressful, but I try to look at it positive. My coping skills is that whatever usually gives me stress is that I trying to see, find out and convince myself it could be worse. So I am grateful that is not as bad as it could be. It is a little bit bad. That gives me some comfort. You know, as I told you I went through 15 years of hell and hard time and difficult times but the thing about it is that I am sitting and talking to you so I survived it.

P6: I actually have a very good life. …nine year ago we bought this farm, we live on a farm and I always wanted even when I finished high school in Iran…, live in farm. …In this kind of life there is great amount of comfort
for me. …I have almost everything I would want from life my garden my animals and have a good workshop I work and make various stuff. I actually I don’t think it can get better than this. I don’t have life related stress I don’t think I have to cope with it. My wife takes care of the farm and run it as business, we both like traveling and both take things easy and that's very helpful. The decent income allows me to do various stuff.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion of Findings

This chapter is designed to discuss the findings of the study. The limitations and strengths of the study are illustrated in the subsequent section. Additionally, the recommendations for future research are presented and followed by a conclusion.

Summary of Findings

Participants indicated that they had a significant experience during the forced migration journey and adjusting to their new lives in the United States. They all struggled with physical and emotional challenges en route, and experienced the loss of leaving their belongings and loved ones behind, along with memories and cultural roots. En route, they got financial and psychological support from their families, friends, and strangers. Thus, these refugees were able to complete their journeys and start a new life in the United States. In the challenging process of the journey, they used both the Cognitive Approach and Avoidant Coping in order to have control over their environment and to be able to move in their new home, the United States.

Sixteen major themes are presented in this study, drawn from the participants’ interviews of how they started their journeys and the challenges they faced in their escape from Iran. The study reveals how these immigrants overcame the impact of the journey and used the support they received along the way. The forced migration had both positive and negative impacts on their lives. Most of the refugees expressed gratitude for their current lifestyles.
Findings and Implications

This qualitative study contributed to the field of psychology by unearthing a deeper understanding of the lived experience of Iranian-Americans who escaped from Iran, including the journey’s emotional and physical impact. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experience of the participants in order to understand the complexities of refugees’ coping with challenging situations, such as overcoming the hardship of leaving a hostile homeland such as Iran. Second, the study aimed to unearth the emotional impacts of forced migration. Third, the study sought to determine how the refugees’ coping mechanisms and supportive resources benefited them during this experience. Lastly, the research revealed the challenges of adjusting to U.S. society.

This study constructed meaning from the voices and stories of six Iranian-Americans who currently live in the United States. All six participants stated that they were affected by the sociopolitical pressure that followed the Iranian revolution and war. The process of data collection began with stories of the hardships they experienced in Iran and ended with their new lives in the United States. Data analysis addressed four research questions:

1. What were the lived experiences of the participants’ in journeys out of Iran?
2. How did they overcome challenging situations en route?
3. How did they utilized supportive resources and coped with post-migration adjustment?
4. What was the emotional impact of the journey on their lives?
Incentive to Leave

The finding of the study in this domain suggested that participants experienced a great amount of pressure while they were living in Iran. This domain is divided into three themes that illustrated a clear picture of participants’ experience under certain conditions in their society. Typically, people migrate to another country with hopes and dreams for their future to construct a better life. On the other hand, in forced migration people do not have many options; most refugees did not wish to leave their country, but when pressure became unbearable, they reached a point where leaving was the only option. The emotional processes experienced by refugees are very different than the individuals who voluntarily migrate to another country (Stein, 1986). The researcher suggested that most refugees experience an accumulation of stressors until they make the decision to leave. Similarly, the participants in the study described their incentive for leaving based on danger of imprisonment, discrimination, losing intellectual and cultural ties, and being deprived of all social rights. Three themes emerged from the participants’ interviews in this category that illustrate the nature of social pressure they were experiencing before they make their decision to flee. Some of them found it stressful and dangerous to live in an environment were they faced constant threat of arrest by the Iranian authority as a result of the political and civil unrest. Other participants explained their main reasons for leaving the country as minimal opportunities to obtain resources to have a free and normal life. They mentioned that there were intolerable social pressures such as discrimination, social instability, and economic deprivation. They described it as “a dark and grave time,” “discrimination,” “no rules no regulations,” “gas coupons,” and “food stamps.” Most participants, however, explained how difficult it was for them to make
their final decisions to leave. Furthermore, some participants explained that they faced religious discrimination. Participants who were considered minorities due to their religious beliefs, such as Jews and Baha’i, explained that they did not have equal rights in society after the Iranian Revolution.

P1: I belonged to a Baha’i family, although I wasn't Baha’i myself, I was deprived of all civil rights. We couldn't get married; I was not officially married. I could not have a business, I could not go to school, and I couldn't own property. See, the best you could have done was to be under the mercy of the government; even ordinary citizens, anybody could do anything to you, you had no protection.

Overall, respondents explained their personal views on the social pressure they experienced before they made their decisions to leave. Participants generally experienced a great deal of discontent. They experienced Iran, their homeland, as an unfamiliar and hostile place with no hope for a better future.

**Initial Emotional Reaction**

In this phase of the process of forced migration participants described their initial emotional reactions to the actual escape in different ways. They experienced mixed feelings as a result of a risky and unknown path ahead of them. Similarly, Drachman and Ryan (1991) suggested that in the departure phase, the person must plan and prepare as they also attempt to tolerate mixed feelings regarding his/her decision to leave. This phase for the refugees is particularly intense, as the decision to leave the country is irreversible and the option of return in most cases is nonexistent (Drachman, & Ryan, 1991). Participants had to cope with strange feelings about the journey, since they had
minimal knowledge of what was going to happen to them in the next few days on the road. They had to tolerate the feelings of not knowing if they were going to survive the route or not. Moreover, encapsulating all kinds of feelings about leaving their lives in the hands of some strangers who were supposed to smuggle them out of Iran. In addition, they had to get ready to say goodbye and be detached from their motherland and their loved ones. The researcher expected more expression of intense emotions from the participants however they reported their initial emotional reactions to the journey as “excitement,” “stressed,” and “numbness and confusion.” Surprisingly, participants mostly minimized the expression of emotional distress toward their journey. For example, some participating explained their feeling toward their journey as “it was like a movie”. They acknowledged having very little control over their environment and therefore, the main way of coping objectively was to physically survive their experiences. According to other researches people try to make sense of the stressor by evaluating the situation as being threatening, challenging, harmful or causing loss to self or loved ones (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). The individual’s unique way of approaching the appraisal process determines how the individual copes with a stressful situation (Folkman, et. al, 1986). Participants’ coping is discussed more in detail further in this study.

Journey

For this study, the journey is defined as the route participants took to escape from Iran to the United States. The journey was a long, complex, and stressful process for all participants. Moreover, all participants had experienced coping with physical and environmental discomfort. Generally, participants experienced high levels of exhaustion
and discomfort during the exodus. For example, one of the participants mentioned that “I was bush walking for 10 hours in complete darkness.” Another common theme that emerged as coping with food and water deprivation; participants portrayed the intense experience of not having access to food and water for long periods of time without being able to foresee their next step on their path. In particular, participants referred to the physical hardship they experienced more than any other psychological distress they may experience in their journey. Surprisingly, the result of the study had significant focus on physical discomfort; hence the researcher expected the participants to talk more about the emotional distress they experienced. Understanding how Iranian refugees express distress may need to be explored within a cultural context because only searching for psychological symptoms may not be an appropriate course of action in the cultural context. Another research suggested that utilizing physical heath services is more common than mental health among Iranian refugees in The Netherlands; however, the rate of PTSD, depression, and anxiety is much higher among Iranian refugees in comparison to other ethnic background’s refugees in the same study (Gerritsen et al., 2006).

Another common experience among all participants was witnessing or experiencing threats to one’s life or safety along the way. Mostly, participants stated that they were terrified of getting killed by the strangers, and they were scared of getting arrested by the authorities; therefore, they had to be hidden on their journeys from one place to another. Some participants realized the serious threat to their safety right after they survived the dangerous situation they were in. The Presented study indicated that during the journey participants did not appraise their situation as an extreme danger
however there all reported serious threat to their safety at least a few times. One of the participants said “later in my life, I realized a lot of things could have gone wrong, it much more likely for me to fail than succeed, but the thoughts had never crossed my mind.” Folkman and his colleague suggested that in primary appraisal individuals evaluate the level of risk involved in the stressful situation and conclude in secondary appraisal what are their options to change the outcome of the risky situation (Folkman, et al, 1986). This study suggested participants did not perceive their journey as dangerous as it was in their primary appraisal. Therefore, in their secondary appraisal they were able to use problem-focused coping to utilize all the available resources on their journey. Also, Moos & Schaefer (1993) explained “Cognitive approach coping” when individual gets logically involved in the hostile situation and positively appraises the available resources such as support of others to cope with the situation (p. 243). At the time of the journey participants were able to find a solution to manage the stressful situation. For instance, one participant got arrested in Turkey and he used his problem solving skills to create a support system for himself in the prison. He described his experience:

P1: The knife that I loved very much, they confiscated it or they wanted to confiscated and I said no you can't confiscate it, I am going to give this as a gift to the ward of the prison, give it to the chief make him happy.

For a successful coping the person needs to understand the stressful situation while accessing the useful resources to deal with adversity (Antonovsky, 1993). In the presented study participants demonstrated a proper cognitive ability to deal with the route’s stressful situations. In long the term, however, it seems there was a shift in the participants’ coping style; they leaned toward distancing themselves from the emotional
experience of the journey. Further in the study the avoidance behavior of the participants is explored in details.

**Experience of Loss**

The findings of this study suggested that all participants experienced different losses during their forced migration. At some point in their journeys, they all had to leave their important belongings behind. In the literature as well as the presented study belongings refer to a sense of connection and involvement to the surrounding environment. The feeling of being fit and valued through shared characters within the social system (Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996). Moreover, according to other studies people experienced a sense of loss as a result of being detached from their belongings (Williams, Coyne & Early, 1996; Keyes and Kane, 2004); likewise, the participants of the presented study showed similar characteristics. Moreover, some participants had experienced a need to detach themselves of their material possessions and sentimental attachments; what they had gathered in life. In the same regard, Jallali’s explained that people who migrated during 1979-1984 are considered a third wave of Iranian immigrants. Thus, they faced many losses such as losing ties with their family, loss of social position and loss of assets because they migrated right before and after the Iranian revolution for various security purposes such as political, economical and personal. Moreover, a majority of the immigrants in the third group were affluent before The Iranian Revolution with different backgrounds, educations and age groups, and many of them were forced to leave Iran unlike other groups that left voluntarily. Note that all participants in the study belong to the third wave of migration from Iran.
In the process of forced migration, participants experienced losing everything that symbolized and attached them to their past in addition to their social roles and identities. Moreover, some participants talked about the negative feelings they experienced leaving loved ones behind; they expressed their feelings as, “survival guilt,” “abandonment,” “regret,” and “disappointment.” In addition, some of them stated that they suffered from loss of identity in the process of emigrating from Iran. The result of the presented study suggested that detachment from belongings can be a painful experience for an individual and leaves the person with sense of loss. Overall, all participants experienced detachment from their belongings during and after their forced migration experience.

People react differently to loss: some deny their inner injury in order to avoid pain, and some cling to loss with chronic grieving and idealization of their cultural loss by rejecting the host culture and leads them to isolation. However, some individuals go through the mourning process for their losses; mourning may work toward more effective coping with losses by helping the individual to find an emotional place for the losses within oneself (Root & Exline, 2014). The process of mourning may facilitate the individual to reach a new understanding of one’s new life that is integrated with the individual’s loss elements (Henry, Stiles, & Biran, 2005). The finding of current study suggested that all participants still suffer from their losses. The result may suggest that participants have not been able to cope effectively with the losses and they were not able to find an emotional place for their losses within themselves.

**Experience of Support on the Path**

All participants benefited from some support throughout their journeys. Participants received support from essentially three different sources: Family and
Friends’ support, Strangers’ support, and Organizations’ supports. Some participants were surprised by the help and support they received from total strangers and smugglers; one participant mentioned the strangers en route went out of their way to help the fleeing family without any monetary expectation, describing his experience as follows:

P3: Sometimes I think about the people [strangers] who were on our journey, the people who helped us in our way; sometimes I think to go back and work for them for a year. … That was a pure service, what they did for us, I don’t know, maybe a miracle…

Some participants talked about the religious organizations that took care of their immigration status and paper work, helping them to accelerate their transition into the United States. Participants had a safer journey as a result of the support they received en route. The findings of the presented study suggested the supports that participants received during their journey could be considered a buffer against sever negative psychological outcomes. Likewise, other researchers suggested that in the face of tragic situations the negative outcome could be overcome with sufficient psychological health and proper support systems (Papadopoulos, 2007). Social support is defined as the availability of help in the person’s time of need (Ghazinour et al., 2004). In the same study researchers suggested that coping resources, sense of coherence, and social integration could expand an individual’s capacity to cope efficiently with trauma, also act as a protective factor against psychological disturbances (Ghazinour et al., 2004). The findings of the presented study are aligned with other research findings; the results of this study showed participants were able to utilize support on their journey that could have
been a major protective factor against the adversity they experienced during the process of forced migration.

**Outcome**

In the first major theme that emerged was the emotional impact of the journey on participants during their post migration phase in the United States. Participants reported that they experienced both positive and negative impacts on their lives. The first part of this section, however, is focused on the positive impact of the journey; the second part of the section; the negative outcome of the journey was explored in depth. At the end of this section the level of participants’ life satisfaction is discussed in detail.

The result of the study indicated that participants were emotionally impacted from forced migration in both positive and negative ways. Similarly, another research on Bosnian refugees suggested that they also experienced both negative and positive feelings in the process of coping with their forced migration. Bosnian refugees were able to experience free life without constant fear of death in their new home and restored their hope for a better future (Keys & Kane, 2004). Moreover, participants in the presented study reported that they chose a more secured future; despite the challenges they faced throughout the journey.

Surprisingly, all respondents felt that the journey had a positive impact on their lives regardless of the hardships they had experienced. They also mentioned how their experience altered their perception about life. One of the participants explained his post migration view toward life, “I see things that have a high likelihood of happening, but I try to limit these things to what I know rather than what I believe or predict.” Another participant mentioned that after his experience leaving Iran he never thought there was
something that he could not do. Other investigators have identified that human strength is often illustrated in negative life events such as losses. According to the same study, many individuals who experienced hardship and major loss reported greater self-worth after realizing they were able to get through the situation (Miller, 2003). This study suggested that participants faced adversity and crisis yet develop a sense of efficacy for being able to pass the situation. Mostly participants explained that failing was not an option for them; they were going to cross the borders successfully and they did it. Aligned with the result of presented study, Miller (2003) argued that human strength is often illustrated in negative life events such as losses. According to the same study, many individuals who experienced hardship and major loss reported greater self-worth after realizing they were able to get through the situation. A meta-analysis on the Middle East’s refugees suggested that one’s ability to perceive life as meaningful and manageable could act as a buffer to common mental health disorders and PTSD symptoms (Lindencrona, Ekblad, & Hauff, 2007). Additionally, the finding of the presented study suggested that participants gained strength as a result of the process of forced migration. The strength and confidence they achieved in the process of migration helped them to deal with resettlement challenges, as well as strengthening their ability to adjust themselves to their new lives’ challenges. These participants have highlighted their growth and personal strength in the face of loss and adversity. They expressed their gratitude toward what they accomplished in the process of their escape to the United States, which allowed them to succeed in their new environment. The result of this suggested that overall, participants’ showed a great deal of ability to cope with the hardships and challenges of the forced migration. On the other hand, Fedrick and colleagues in a prior study explained that
intense trauma pre-migration, such as torture, exposure can severely decrease the capacity of the person to handle stress and increase the risk of ones mental; the psychological damage can be irreversible (Fredrick, Ekblad & Hauff, 2008). The result of the presented study could not be applicable for all refugees due to the limited number of participants. Although, the result of this study suggests that there are unique nuances involved in the experiencing traumatic events for each individual and it is important to pay attention to individual’s unique responses to those experiences.

On the other hand, the difficult aspects of adversity cannot be denied. People in traumatic events typically experience intense emotional pressure and pain. Yet, some people find a short-term solution to pass the crisis successfully and move forward. Most participants in the presented study used Cognitive Approach Coping to solve the problems at the time of crisis on their journey, however, they did not elaborate in detail about the challenges they faced during the post migration phase in the United States. Thus, it may suggest that in the log term, the participants used another coping style to deal with distress. Some researchers proposed another form of dealing with stressful situations in life is using “Cognitive avoidance coping” in which individuals try to invalidate the intensity of the problem, withdraw from the problem, and escape unpleasant emotions (Moos & Schaefer, 1993, p. 243). In this form of coping individuals undermined the intensity of the adversity and focused on something else. Most participants mentioned that the experience of forced migration pushed them to work harder for a better life. For example, one participant said, “the experience pushed more to work harder and I was probably working about 24 hours a day for about three or four years after I finished my medical training.” Also he talked about his ways of coping with
stress on a daily bases, “I try to book all my times, back to back, so I don’t have time to sit-down and think about it…” Surprisingly, most participants have shown some level of avoidance in their coping, yet they recognized it as their strength in dealing with difficult situations. It seems that participants of this study had a shift in their coping style over time; they found it more suitable to chose Cognitive avoidant coping by not paying attention to the pain they experienced.

In addition it has been a silence around the phenomenon of escaping Iran in the Iranian-American community. As a result, there are not many studies available on Iranian-American refugees as opposed to other ethnic groups. Bozorgmehr (1996) reported in Los Angeles less than one in five of Iranian refugees received any type of organizational help in moving from Iran to the United States. This result could be related to the Iranian-American refugees coping style; they may choose Cognitive Avoidant Approach in their adjustment process in the United States. Moreover, the political atmosphere between Iran and the United States could be another factor for the silence of the community. After The Iranian revolution in 1997 the relationship between two countries came to an end. Additionally, the 1979 American hostage crisis put Iranians who were living in the United States in an intense fear and instability due to the tight security control, and high number of deportations and cancelations of U.S. visa status by U.S. authorities (Ghazinour & Sabagh 1988). The presented study intended to give voice to the experience of Iranian-Americans who escaped form their motherland and faced tremendous challenges for a safer and better life. It is important to acknowledge the strength and resiliency that enabled participants to come to the United States and build a better future.
In traumatic events the individuals are confronted with stressful situations that are beyond their psychological resources therefore they experience a decline in their level of normal functioning; over time some people are able to build more strength by expanding their capacity to cope with adversity. O’Leary and Icovikes (1995) conceptualized resilience in creating the resilience and thriving model. The resilience and thriving model has three levels: survival, recovery, and thriving. Similarly, participants in the presented study experienced three stages that are mentioned in Resilience and Thriving Model. In the survival level, pre-resettlement, participants were able to pass the intense challenges they faced on their journey. In the recovery, post-migration, they had to cope with a new set of challenges during their adjustment in new home. The thriving stage presented their current life satisfaction and success.

The last emerging theme was Satisfaction in Life. The result of the study concluded that a majority of the participants expressed their overall satisfaction in their lives. They all mention that they have a proper outlet such as exercise and music for releasing daily stress. The findings of presented study were aligned with other researchers in that they found quality of life was heavily related to sense of coherence, coping resources, and social support among Iranian refugees who resettled in Sweden (Ghazinour, Richter, & Eisemann, 2004). Overall, participants were able to make sense of their forced migration and gained some level of control on their lives. They also found that the journey was important for a better future therefore it was worthy to tolerate the challenges.

The last observation that is worthy to discuss in this section; among all participants of this study there was only one person who had a total different experience than the
other participants in his journey. He mentioned that he did not have to escape Iran like other people whose life where in jeopardy however he could have stayed there and have a normal life. His escape was not a necessity as he described. Additionally, the information from his interview showed that he did not have a proper support during his journey like other participants. The outcome of the journey had a great negative impact on his psychological health.

P5: … For such a long time, I used to have nightmare, in which I was back in Iran and I have to take this path one more time, gain not feeling secured. These nightmares used to wake me up with intense fear. These nightmares last long, for more than four, five years, I had these nightmares, and I had these nightmares on and off, repeating over and over again.

The level of loss and dissatisfaction of his migration was not similar to other participants. For instance he described his outcome of his forced migration:

P5: I think the process of getting out of Iran, then the attempts at adaptability have destroyed something in me, have deleted my history; I have been cut off from the first 25 years of my life [bursts into tears].

For the purpose of presented study the most frequents responses was considered as emerging themes however the participant’s experience is important to be explored in depth for future research for identifying the factors may contribute to the negative outcome for Iranian-American refugees.
Conclusion and Implication

It is important to remember forced migration is a complex process and have many dimensions. The individuals who experienced forced migration are emotionally impacted by the experience in both positive and negative ways. During the complex process they used all of the available resources in order to cope with different stages of migration. In addition, many of these individuals passed the traumatic experience without major permanent psychological damages however they have the scars from their experience as a reminder of their resiliency for the rest of their life.

Clinical Implication

In addition to pointing out the need for further research concerning refugees, the findings of this study provided insights concerning mental health practitioners. It is crucial that mental health care providers understand the coping style of this population. It can be more beneficial to not only focus on the short-term coping style and explore how they deal with stressful situations in the long-term. It is also essential for mental health practitioners to recognize the covert verbal explanation of the presented population. For instance, this population may describe their distress in the form of physical challenges and concerns. Additionally, they may avoid the negative emotions by focusing on things they believe are more important for having a better future, such as work and education, and they consider these distractions as their main strength in dealing with their feelings of distress. Moreover, providing culturally appropriate accessible mental health services would be beneficial for extra support in order to maximize their ability to move forward. The result of the presented study intended to offer a greater cultural understanding for mental health professionals to distinguish maladaptive coping from the strength of their
patients. Also providing a holistic view on Iranian-American refugees’ resiliency that is a combination of Cognitive Approach and Avoidant Copings. Since refugees cope in varying ways, a clinician must be able to appreciate the refugees’ ways of coping from the perspective of knowing that the human response to surviving adversity is a complex process, and finally related to the totality of human experience. Mental health professionals are encouraged to place a great emphasis on utilizing all sources of social support for this population since the result of the presented study suggested the available support could act as a major buffer against psychological negative outcome in the face of adversity.

**Limitation of The Study**

In interpreting the result of the presented research, a number of limitations need to be acknowledged. The presented sample may not be representative of the wider group of Iranian-American refugees in the United States.

In the sampling strategy the researcher used her network in the Iranian-American community and this may have limited the sample to smaller circles of Iranian-Americans who may have things in common as the basis of their familiarities and shared interests. These commonalities may have created more harmonies in the data. The sensitive nature of the study created limitations for people to come forward and talk about their experience. The researcher was able to interview 6 participants out of 20 original volunteers because rest of the group changed their mind for participating in the study. The sample also may have been skewed by differences in those who chose to participate and those who did not. Those who did not participate may have had a more negative emotional impact by the journey thus refused to discuss their experience.
Another limitation was the lack of a female viewpoint in the discussion. The number of females who escaped borders of Iran is lesser than the number of males however it is important to explore female perspective on the phenomenon.

Language was another factor that needs to be acknowledged as possible source of limitation. Some participants’ chose to have their interview in Farsi and during the transcription process it was not possible to get a meaningful translated transcript by using word-by-word transcription. Therefore the researcher had to translate the interviews the way it can stay meaningful for data analysis.

**Future Research**

The participants in this study described their challenging experiences and the support they received prior to resettlement. But future research could benefit from (a) exploring the adjustment challenges Iranian-American faced in the United States, (b) exploring their long-term coping style that enabled them to move forward with their lives in a new country, (c) understanding the level of acculturation at the time of interview, (d) exploring the level of pre-migration psychological well-being, and (e) exploring the possibility of being exposed to war, past experience of torture, or any other traumatic event.

In the current study only one participant mentioned that it was not mandatory for him to escape Iran and he could stay there and live like other people; he also added that he could have waited for a couple years then legally leave the country. He painted out that he did not have any support during and after his emigration from Iran. Moreover he was the only participant that expressed a tremendous level of pain as a result of his experience. It would be beneficial to explore the experience of those Iranian-Americans.
who had to go through the forced migration without any support to get a better understanding of the role of support in the escapee’s mental health outcomes.
References


Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Services, 1(2), 21.


Appendix A: Information and Consent Form

I am conducting an exploratory study of Iranian-American who eluded borders of Iran during 1980-2000. In order to understand their experience, I am requesting your participation. Your participations in this research project will avail to explore relevant issues regarding the impact of the journey on the present life and emotional health of Iranian who experienced homogeneous situation in Iranian-American community, as well as avail mental health professional to gain a deeper understanding of Iranian-American community in general.

Your one-time participation in this study will take about one hour. During this time, I will ask you to fill out a brief two questionnaires, and participate in an interview about your journey living Iran. It is important to know if you are uncomfortable with any question, you are not obligated to answer. You are free to withdraw from the study without any consequences or question. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential at all times. Your name or any identifying information will be excluded from the study. All of the data obtained in the interview and through the demographic information from will be used ONLY for the purpose of this research study. With your consent, I will use voice recorder during our interview in order to facilitate and ensure the correct transcription and analysis of the data. Your confidentiality will not be jeopardized with the use of a tape recorder. After transcribing the interviews audio files will be kept in a locked cabinet. Your demographic information form will be assigned with a random number which will be placed on your audio file to ensure your privacy. When all data is analyzed and I begin writing my result, I will replace your random respondent number with a fake name and all the identifying information from your interview will be
illuminated and will not be used in the study. Please note that all of the information on audio files, notes and forms will be placed in a locked location at all times.

There are no anticipated political risk for your participation in this study due to the focus of the study on your adjustment and your emotional experience during your migration process. To minimize any potential political risk the researcher will not include any part of your story that you or the researcher feel it could put you at risk. The participants’ identification will be absolutely protected and confidential. All the identifying information from the interview will be illuminated. Additionally, all the political statement will be excluded from the study.

There is a small chance that you re-live your past experience of the journey or have some flashbacks, or nightmare of your past experience of escape during or after interview. To minimize the psychological risk of the study the researcher will provide you a list of mental health providers that can help you process your negative emotions.

Your interview information is considered as data for this study and some of the non-identifying information may be used in the result of this study. The dissertation study will be published and your anonymity will be kept at all time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Hamideh Golestaneh at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can also contact Dr. Sharleen O’Brien dissertation supervisor at sobrien3@antioch.edu.

The research and procedures have been explained to me. I agree to participate in this study by signing this form. My participation is voluntary and I do not have to sign this form if I do not want to be a part of this research project. I have read this consent
form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

I will receive a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature______________________________________________

Date__________________________________________

Name_______________________________________________

Signature of Researcher_____________________________
Appendix B: Interview Question

1. Tell me about when you first learned or realized you may need to leave your country?
   What was your first reaction, feelings?
   What was happening in your life, family, and friends?

2. Tell me about your decision to leave.

3. Tell me about the last few days prior to the departure?

4. Please tell me the story of your journey?

5. How did you picture your future when you wanted to leave the country?

6. How did this experience affect your personal and professional life?

7. What is your emotional experience when you think back of the journey?
   What kinds emotional of impacts then and now?

8. How do you generally cope with stress on a daily base?
   What has been helpful?

9. Is there any thing you would like to add?
Appendix C: Background Questionnaire

Participant Code_______

The emotional impact of Iran’s Border Passing

Please answer the following questionnaire. Please be accurate with your response as much as possible. This information will be used for research purposes only. ALL THE INFORMATION IS FULLY CONFIDENTIAL.

General questions regarding your escape from Iran

1. When did you flee from your country?

2. How old you were at the time of the flee?

3. What was the reason that you had to flee? ___Political, ___Religion, ___Social Issues, ___Other(specify):_____________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________

4. How many days did it take you to get out of Iran?

5. Were you married at the time of your departure? ___Yes, ___No.

6. Did you have any children prior to leaving the country? ___Yes (How many? __), ___No.

7. Did you have any other family members in the country?

8. Did you have any social support during this process?.....distinguish between before and after

   9. Did you have any social support when you arrived in United States?

Background Information
1. What is your age? ___ Years

2. What is your gender? (Circle one)  Male  Female

3. What is your highest education level? (Circle one/ fill-in-blank)

   Some High School  High School Graduate  Some College

   College Graduate (degree___)

   Postgraduate Training (degree___)

4. Are you currently employed? ___ Yes, ___ No.

5. What is your current occupation? (Please specify)


   If yes:

   Prayer

   Meditation

   Individual

   Other (Please specify)
Appendix D: Flyer

I am conducting my dissertation research on coping mechanism of those Iranian-American who escaped Borders of Iran between 1989-1995. All participants must be over 25 years old. Please join me in this valuable psychological research, if you are part of this population and willing to contribute to my research. My doctoral dissertation supervisor is Dr. Sharleen O’Brien, sobrien3@antioch.edu.

ALL OF YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL.

Hamideh Golestaneh, M.A.
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Antioch University Santa Barbara

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