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Accessibility to Resources for Homeless Documented Immigrant Families:

A Case Study

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School at the
University of Missouri- St. Louis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the issue of homelessness as experienced by documented immigrants within an urban community. Research has shown that due to disadvantages including but not limited to lack of economic mobility, employment access, lone parent families, and cultural background, some immigrant families may face challenges accessing services (Arnold, 2004). Difficulty accessing services then can inhibit adjustment and may lead to homelessness. This case study will highlight the experience of a documented homeless immigrant family, as defined by the McKinney Vento Act, with a child enrolled in public schools in the City of St. Louis, Missouri. Based on the results from this study, a better understanding of challenges that homeless immigrant families face while trying to access housing, social services, and educational services will be discussed. This study offers strategies on how various types of resources can be communicated to this population within or across the institutions and community networks in which they take part. Understanding the perspective and gaining knowledge of effective resource access for this specific population will assist social workers, teachers and other professionals in the field of education.

Keywords: Immigrant homelessness, McKinney Vento Act, Social Network Theory

DEDICATION

In dedication to my loving mother and husband who have always pushed me to continue to pursue my passion of helping others. Building endless relationships have given me the opportunity to explore where help and support is needed the most. Thank you to all of my elementary, secondary, and higher education teachers/professors for instilling in me the importance of how research guides practice in our growing society.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Immigrants have to adjust to new social, cultural and economic dynamics when migrating to a new country. These adjustments can have positive and negative short- and long- term impacts on their economic, physical, psychological and/or emotional/spiritual well-being (Jamil, 2007). Large numbers of immigrant children can experience serious problems with education, physical and mental health, poverty, and assimilation into American society (Tienda, 2011). When their families are not able to adjust economically due to structural challenges, this can lead to becoming homeless. Homelessness is a social problem that is often devastating to families, but is especially detrimental to young children (Gargiulo, 2006). Educational practitioners must support children who are experiencing homelessness. School liaisons, most often social workers or school counselors, are responsible for ensuring the identification, school enrollment, attendance, and opportunities for academic success of students in homeless situations (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Federal law mandates a screening that consists of an intake form to identify all homeless students, though there is no separate intake for immigrant and refugee students who have additional vulnerability. According to the U.S. Department of Education there are more than 840,000 immigrant students enrolled in U.S. schools. Of this immigrant student enrollment count 181,764 are currently experiencing homelessness (U.S Department of Education). The chart below shows detailed homeless student counts.

# of immigrant students in the US	840,000
# of immigrant students experiencing homeless in US	181,764
# of immigrant students in SLPS	2,700
# of immigrant students experiencing homelessness in SLPS	810- (30% families come in homeless)

These students and their families have a right to education regardless of their citizenship status, but some are faced with social challenges, such as homelessness, may lack the knowledge to find and utilize additional resources. These resources may be provided from the community and likely within local schools. Community social service professionals and school personnel need to understand and address the barriers faced by homeless immigrant students and their families.

The United States Department of Education requires school districts to track student homelessness; immigrant and refugee students are included in the general count. School districts track student homelessness based on the number of Student in Transition Intakes that are completed within one school year by school support staff. Identifying students and families then allows Students in Transition programs to design interventions. In 2017, 1.7 million students within the United States were identified as being homeless during their educational career (United States Department of Education). Specifically, within Missouri, there are more than 41,768 students and their families experiencing homelessness. Within the Saint Louis Public School District 5,438, students and their families reported being homeless during the 2017-2018 school year. Of this number, approximately 20% represent immigrant and refugee families (Thomas-Murray, 2018).

The experiences of such students are fraught in a political climate that has become increasingly hostile to immigrants. In a statement released on January 31, 2017 in response to the outcome of the U.S. presidential election and anti-immigrant rhetoric on the part of the new president, District Superintendent Dr. Kelvin Adams reiterated that Saint Louis Public Schools supports all families. The statement highlights the district's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and welcomed immigrant and refugee students in the

district. This statement illustrates SLPS approach to supporting immigrant and refugee families. To fulfill this commitment, SLPS offers an ESOL program, supporting more than 2600 English Language Learners who come from more than 53 countries and speak 46 different languages. Most students begin at the Nahed Chapman New American Academy, which provides services to ELL newcomers and prepares them to transition to neighborhood and magnet schools within the district where they continue to receive ELL supports, work on attaining proficiency in English and mastery of content in various academic disciplines. Along with academic supports, the ESOL Program also provides language support to ELL students and families through the District's bilingual team (Dr. Kelvin Adams, 2017).

During the current political climate, this statement was meant to ensure that families are aware that diversity will continue to be valued within all schools. Schools will also continue working towards an inclusive community. Within this statement, Superintendent Adams focused SLPS priorities to meet such values through language support within the ESOL program. Yet social workers in SLPS might do more to expand access to social services. Although the Nahed Chapman New American Academy has a social worker to address these issues, some schools have ELL programs without a designated individual to address social service needs. There is no program or entity of the current Students in Transition system that caters specifically to homeless immigrant and refugee families. Services provided under the McKinney Vento Act for natural born students are the same services that homeless immigrant and refugee students must utilize. These services may not be enough to meet their needs. Due to differences of vulnerability and experiences,

homeless immigrant and refugee students should be provided with additional services unique to their needs.

School Oriented Programs to Assist Immigrant Homeless Families

Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, all school-aged children who are enrolled in school regardless of citizenship status are provided with educational rights if they are experiencing homelessness. The goal of this policy was to design ways in which the homeless population can be assisted and eventually become self-sufficient without the needs of government assistance. The high mobility, trauma, and deep poverty for families that are homeless create unique educational barriers and challenges. Homelessness is associated with lower standardized test scores and a higher likelihood of missing school and/or experiencing multiple transfers. Thus, homeless students often require additional supports for academic achievement and success on state assessments (SLPS, Deidra Thomas-Murray).

The service/program under the McKinney Vento Act requires all school districts nationwide to offer a program known as Families and Youth in Transition. Families and Youth in Transition Programs ensure that all school district staff, students, and community members are aware of the legal definition of homelessness and know how to identify students. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines homelessness as “doubling up” with relatives or friends, living in motels, hotels, or abandoned buildings, living in homeless shelters, awaiting foster care placement, and minors not residing with legal parent or guardian, as in the case of runaways. In addition, the program guarantees that all students who meet these eligibility standards are provided the following educational rights: immediate school enrollment even if they lack required

paperwork (birth certificates, social security cards, previous school transcripts, shot records, etc.); right to attend school of origin; transportation to the school of origin; supplemental educational services; right to attend school with students that are not experiencing homelessness; connections with community supports; and have their rights posted in all schools and other places in the communities. Below you will find the list of additional resources that are mandated by the McKinney Vento Act that the school provides or for which it sends referrals.

Basic Needs	Mental Health	Language	Housing	Employment
Community action agencies	Places for people	ESL courses at local schools	Low income housing list	Rise together ministries
Family Support Division	Bi-lingual International Assistance Services	St. Francis Community Services	Section 8 housing	St. Louis Mosaic Project
Food Banks		International Language Center		
Baitul-Mal Charity		YMCA Literacy Council of Greater St.Louis		
Local churches				

Families and Youth in Transition Offices within school districts assist students and families living in homeless situations with immediate needs such as: providing referrals to housing resource centers, therapy within schools for the homeless student caseload, providing appropriate clothing and shoes to families, helping caregivers obtain medical records for students, and coordinating transportation for students. This program also provides supports that will assist students' long term. Families and Youth in

Transition Offices assist high school students in preparing for college and vocational trade schools by offering college readiness courses, providing education verification and homeless youth status to prospective institutions, providing information on obtaining financial aid, and providing youth with homeless scholarship opportunities. These services are provided strictly by the local school district. Social workers and counselors at individual schools are responsible for identifying families that may be experiencing homelessness and not be aware of these services provided out of the Family and Youth in Transition Office. Such awareness of what is available is essential if one is to utilize services offered. In addition, it is the job of the local school district to ensure that all students are educated regardless of unfortunate personal circumstances that may arise. These services assist disadvantaged families that may not understand how to identify and navigate through the process of obtaining resources. The limitation to this program is that it focuses only on temporary housing and fails to assist families with finding permanent housing. While these services are available to all students, immigrant students may face particular barriers while seeking to obtain these services.

All low-income populations face barriers to applying for, retaining, and using the services provided by mainstream programs; however, these barriers are compounded by the inherent conditions of homelessness, such as transience, instability, and a lack of basic resources (Czerwinski, 2002). Transience due to not having a stable address can limit communication between families and resources. Lacking basic resources will establish limitations for individuals to apply for services. For example, in order to apply for federal aid programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) or Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

(WIC) one must have an address listed on the application. Therefore, additional barriers affect how native-born citizens access resources. It is possible that although all low-income populations face barriers, homeless immigrant and refugee families are likely at a greater disadvantage due to unforeseen barriers that schools are not aware of. Saint Louis Public School District has yet to examine closely barriers that are associated with homeless immigrant and refugee's ability to access resources.

The number of English Language Learners (ELLS) continues to grow rapidly in the United States suggesting that their families need interpreters for deeper understanding of resources provided to them to assist with homelessness (Borrero, 2011). In most public school districts language barriers are indeed an issue, so they provide free interpreters. Interpreters will ensure that the correct information is communicated so that language brokering between children and parents will not become an uncomfortable issue for children. Additionally there are cultural barriers in which some immigrant and refugee families may not believe that one definition of homelessness is "doubling up with a family member". Though these are only two of many possible barriers immigrant and refugees face when being homeless, they suggest possible additional barriers SLPS schools have yet to identify and address for enrolled students.

This study helps to better understand and highlight barriers through an in-depth exploratory case study of a homeless documented immigrant family. Currently there is no specific policy or protocol to address the needs of homeless immigrant families in Saint Louis Public School District. Even though immigrant and refugee families are afforded the opportunity to utilize the services under the McKinney Vento Act there are likely barriers preventing access. There have not been any recent attempts by SLPS to

understand families' perspective on barriers they face while attempting to access resources. This study is this the first to do so in decades. It will help make educational professionals aware of how homeless immigrant families experience the process of accessing resources that are not directly designed for them. This study is important because it will provide a starting point for school personnel to create programs and/or advocate for policies that provide access to school based and community resources for homeless immigrant and refugee students. Within this study, questions regarding knowledge and utilization of services and resources, in addition to challenges to resource access, are explored.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses immigrant homelessness in the United States, as well as the issues surrounding immigrant family vulnerability within St. Louis as it relates to children receiving a formal education. There is a lack of literature highlighting the impact immigrant homelessness has on children and families in addition to how they access resources. Immigrant status and vulnerability, socioeconomic factors precipitating homelessness, immigrant structure of homelessness, and immigrant access to resources/services/ and school supports are major topics surrounding this study highlighted in this review.

Immigrant Status and Vulnerability

The United States foreign-born population is approximately 42.1 million. Amongst this, 22.3%, immigrants live in poverty, compared to 13.2% of US-born citizens (Gilleland, 2016). Based on an interview with Arizaga (2006), immigrants come to the United States of America due to its historical openness of opening its doors to welcome those seeking political and religious freedom. Immigrants and their children bring long-term economic benefits to the United States as a whole. Immigrants add about \$10 billion each year to the U.S. economy. Reunification with family, employment and the use of health care services are additional reasons why immigrants come to the United States. A study by Berk, Schur, Chavez & Frankel (2000) explored reasons for immigrating to the United States. Based on the results from this study, education, work, and reunification with family and friends are why undocumented immigrants migrate to the United States.

Upon arrival, some immigrants face unique challenges that predispose them to poverty. The challenges they face are lower paying jobs, language barriers, issues

regarding legal status and cultural differences, as well as difficulty accessing federal and state services, which often may lead to becoming homelessness (Moran, 2013).

Legal Categories of Immigrants

Distinct differences within the types of immigrant communities are pertinent to what services/resources that they have access to in order to prevent homelessness.

Documented immigrants are those who entered the United States legally by applying through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for an immigrant visa or have adjusted status to a lawful permanent resident, which is a Green Card holder. The US Government maintains records of fingerprints, photos, DNA, medical histories, criminal backgrounds, and conducts interviews. (US Citizenship and Immigration Services). If given legal status, immigrants are afforded certain legal protections and access to federally funded homeless shelters. They are able to utilize provisions under the McKinney Vento Act.

Undocumented immigrants are people who entered the US illegally; they do not seek registration or documents. The US Government has no record of them (US Citizenship and Immigration Service). According to Johnson (2007), undocumented immigrants are more vulnerable than other groups and more at risk in all social and economic interactions because they lack legal status. Undocumented immigrants are more vulnerable to homelessness because they are likely to forego assistance, whether it be for shelter bed or asking for police help, rather than risk detention or deportation (Turnball, 2010).

A refugee is a person who leaves their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster (UNHCR). Refugees will leave their country due to the threat of

persecution or death, leaving behind jobs, houses and personal possessions to endure great hardship in their fight for safety and survival. (Edwards, 2015). Legal protections and community resources are afforded to those who hold refugee status. The US Department of State, Bureau of Population, Migration & Refugees provides a resettlement grant to sponsoring agencies to help address the refugees' housing, food, and other basic needs for up to 90 days after arrival. For example, according to the International Institute (2017), staff from these agencies meet refugees at the airport, take them to housing that are obtained for them, provide orientation, and help them begin the process of building a new life in America. If they do not secure employment or long-term resources after 90 days, they may face economic insecurity that may lead to homelessness. Nonetheless, refugees are temporarily stable due to short-term resources provided by resettlement programs, but then they are forced back into a battle that both documented and undocumented immigrants are faced with, sometimes homelessness.

A study by Murdie (2008) investigates the experiences of refugees in making their way from transitional accommodations to more permanent housing in Toronto. This study found that refugee claimants experienced a more difficult pathway to housing than sponsored refugees, in the initial stages of settlement. Sponsored refugees made less use of government reception centers and housing help centers and both groups relied more heavily on informal sources, such as friends and relatives, for housing information and help. In addition, refugees are liable for their \$1500 average travel loan, in which they must begin to pay back after 6 months arrival in the United States.

Social issues that precipitate homelessness among immigrant communities are economic challenges, language and education, undocumented status, and barriers to

housing (Gilleland, 2016). Although all of these social issues have an impact, economic challenges and barriers to housing have the largest impact on why immigrants and refugees become homeless. Indeed, Shinn (2007) suggests that income inequality is a predictor of becoming homeless and thus is a significant issue in the United States where income inequality is large especially within some vulnerable immigrant and refugee communities.

Socioeconomic Factors Precipitating Homelessness

There are a variety of social factors that may have an impact on immigrants becoming homeless. These include but are not limited to unemployment, low wages, educational attainment, imprisonment, domestic violence, mental illness and substance abuse. In a study conducted by Tan and Ryan (2001) a comparison of homelessness among Hispanics and non-Hispanics was conducted at the Texas-Mexico border. Researchers found that Hispanics most commonly identified relationship problems (thirty-seven percent), job-related issues (35.8 percent), and health issues (3.8 percent) as contributing to their homelessness. Although this is only one example, these same social factors/problems leading to becoming homeless have been identified in other cultures.

The unemployment rate of refugees in their first year in America is 46% and decreases over time (United Way of King County). When immigrants and refugees find an employment opportunity, it is often a low-skilled job with inadequate pay. Amongst low-skilled job placement, 35% percent of immigrants make less than \$25,000 a year compared to 21% of native-born workers (Lasco, 2011). Immigrant communities still face challenges in maintaining economic stability when they solidify employment. Fair Labor Standards, as required by the Fair Labor Standards Act, are not always practiced

by employers and or enforced by the government, particularly for undocumented workers. This leads to unsafe work environments, long hours, and unfair and inadequate pay (Kerwin, 2011). Although employers are aware that this is an illegal practice, it benefits them financially, allowing more labor at lower wages. Being undocumented with a limited amount of opportunities offered means there are not as many options in regards to ensuring financial security to obtain and maintain adequate housing for a family.

Immigrant Structure of Homelessness

On average, the cost to secure housing within the Midwest is approximately \$1,000; this is including a mandatory refundable deposit and first month rent. With low wages and supporting a family, this amount could take months to save and maintain. In comparison, in fast growing cities such as Seattle, where rent costs for housing is “10th highest in the US and was rising faster than any other major city” (Cohen, 2014) immigrants struggle to find housing. Immigrants and refugees typically find a resettlement area in which economically they could sustain and housing would not be difficult to find. Unfortunately, some families do not have options regarding what state in which to settle. Lacking options and awareness of community resources that are available to them leads to being vulnerable and residing with family members or friends.

Spending over more than half of a monthly income on housing costs can be a challenge and overwhelming, making it less likely to find affordable housing. Of the 74.3 million owner occupied households nationwide, 89% were native-born, while 11% were foreign-born (Trevelyan, 2013). Due to the inability to obtain housing these communities will rely on family or friends until they can find an affordable option. Zoning laws then become an issue because they cap the number of individuals that can legally live under

one roof. Household capping laws harm immigrants that need to live with friends because of finances or lack of affordable housing (Oliveri, 2009).

Being unable to afford housing then leads to becoming homeless. Baker (1994) suggested that Latinos, although statistically prone to poverty, were less likely to suffer absolute homelessness because they are more willing than other groups to engage in a variety of residential arrangements, including young adults living with parents, non-related adults sharing housing, multiple families doubling up, and in the case of immigrants, parents living with adult children over age 45. This is common amongst other ethnic groups as well, specifically the Bosnian, East African, and Philippine communities. For Asians, the assumption was that strong family, kinship and community ties ultimately buffered against the vulnerability to homelessness (Molina 2000; Takahashi 1998). This is not true; there are some Asian families that lack kinship and community ties, but the majority do not and are not faced with the difficulty of experiencing sudden homelessness.

According to Jenson (2012) immigrant homelessness can be looked at as a pyramid. On the bottom is the concept of relative homelessness, which is a broad category that includes those who are housed but who reside in substandard shelter and/or may be at risk of losing their home. Hidden homelessness includes people without a place of their own who live in a car, with family or friends, or in a long-term institution. Lastly, absolute homelessness is a narrow concept that includes only those living on the street or in emergency shelters. Within the United States, it is not common for immigrants to display this form of absolute homelessness because of the stigma that is associated with living in a shelter or on the street. Most immigrant families tend to

display hidden homelessness and relative homelessness. This would most often involve living with family members or friends of family members, or at risk of losing the home that they are renting or has temporary assistance for. Most often refugee families are granted assistance when they are not able to return to their home country due to fear that they will be persecuted because of race, religion, nationality, or beliefs. There are several programs provided within the states to assist immigrant and refugee families with temporary housing and financial assistance, but the effectiveness of these programs has not yet been determined. There are still immigrant and refugee families that are included within the definition of homelessness.

There is a lack of literature that outlines how immigrant and refugee families have access to community resources and services in addition to how agencies ensure families are aware of and utilize services that are available. In a recent study by Campbell (2004) the utilization of health resources was noted, which may reflect the utilization of other resources, specifically housing. Social and family networks may be the key determinants of access to, and use of, health services among undocumented immigrants living in urban areas. In the United States, undocumented immigrants arrive bearing a disproportionate burden of undiagnosed illness and lacking immunizations standard in the U.S. and other basic preventative care. Undocumented immigrants often enter the country under adverse circumstances and live in substandard conditions, factors that exacerbate poor health. Language barriers, lack of knowledge about the healthcare system and fear of detection by authorities are factors that limit the ability of undocumented immigrants to access healthcare (Campbell, 2014).

Specifically this researcher is suggests that language barriers and lack of

knowledge about and access to healthcare are potentially reasons why services are not utilized. This could also be reflective of why immigrant and refugee families fail to use social services that are provided; they do not understand what is available. Therefore, agencies and local programs should be effectively communicating and making families aware of services that are provided to them.

Homelessness is often a taboo topic within immigrant communities and is discussed primarily within agencies that cater to this specific population. There is an abundance of literature that highlights the health effects that homelessness has on immigrant populations, in addition to reports of medical practitioners who have seen this epidemic evolve. According to Redelmeier (2009), recent immigrants who are homeless are physically and mentally healthier and less likely to have chronic health conditions and substance use problems than native-born homeless individuals. This is more than likely due to recent immigrants being more vulnerable to becoming homeless with fewer physical and mental health problems, which are highly prevalent among native-born individuals who are homeless. This is important because health practitioners are making strides to address the issues that revolve around immigrant homelessness and homelessness has theoretically been linked to health issues and mental illness. The prevalence of serious mental illness (including major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder) is reported as 25-30% in the street homeless population and those living in direct-access hostels. Homelessness is also associated with higher rates of personality disorder, self-harm and attempted suicide. Homelessness can be both a cause and a consequence of mental illness (Perry, 2015). Although the health of homeless immigrants

is not the primary topic at hand, it is important to understand that research within health education helps ensure that this topic is being addressed.

Immigrant children tend to have higher mobility rates than natural born children and their economic situations often result in high rates of poverty (Burt, 2001). Even when immigrant children are affected by their families' struggle to find adequate housing, a policy has been put into place to help these children be successful personally and academically. According to the McKinney-Vento Act a student is eligible for assistance if he or she lacks a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." In addition, doubling up is a major characteristic of homelessness that immigrant families with children exhibit. School districts offer several resources to assist with mental health, transportation, school and classroom adjustment, parenting, and job skills. In reference to homeless immigrants overall school progress they often are delayed academically. Immigrant children tend to have high rates of developmental delays and may require educational testing and special education services (American Academy of Pediatrics). More resources similar to what is currently provided are needed to assist this population, but there is a lack of funding to do so. Due to the limited amount of funding that is provided to school districts they are only able to do a limited amount of work that is needed for immigrant children to be successful. Some districts have established temporary housing for students, but they are not able to accommodate the entire family. In order to be successful in the future and ensure job and housing security, education is essential for citizens and immigrants.

Immigrant Access to Resources/Services and School Supports

A study by Shier (2016) explored factors that explained immigrant housing vulnerability. This study used administrative data from housing support recipients to analyze and determine the varied demographic, socio-economic, and health-related factors that contribute to living in a precarious housing situation. Demographic and service utilization information was collected from all participants of the study. Based on the results, significant predictors of living in a precarious housing situation include the size of the city of residence, level of employment, marital status, having a mental illness and having a present addiction. Based on this study, immigrants accessing housing supports who experienced unemployment and underemployment had greater odds of being in a precarious housing situation. It is clear that attaining adequate employment is an important factor in securing permanent, stable housing. Based on the results of this study, employment can determine if immigrant families can remain stable. With some families not being able to obtain permanent employment, accessing services and resources within the community is beneficial. Shier (2016) also hypothesized that access to services might be an explanation why a larger city of residence improves the odds of an immigrant accessing housing supports living in permanent, stable housing. Yet literature outlining how homeless immigrants and refugees have access to housing resources and social support services is scarce.

The educational needs of children who are homeless frequently go unmet despite the fact that schools serve as a “safe harbor” for these youngsters (Gargiulo, 2005). Schools are safe harbors because there are resources and supports to uplift families during the time of hardship. There is a gap in the literature as it relates to how school

districts provide supports to homeless immigrant and refugee students and families.

Perhaps this is likely due to immigrant children having the same educational rights as natural born children. Supports that are provided under the McKinney Vento Act due to homelessness are for all children receiving a formal education. The literature does discuss how educators should identify immigrant homeless students.

Support staff within schools have a primary responsibility to ensure that all social needs are met for students and families. Unfortunately, immigrant and refugee families face additional barriers to obtaining resources and supports that natural born students do not. This study identifies some of these barriers through its case study of one documented family experience obtaining resources.

Social Network Theory

Social network theory is also relevant to this study. Social scientists have investigated three kinds of networks: egocentric, sociocentric, and open-system networks. Egocentric networks are those networks that are connected with a single or node individual. Socio-centric networks are networks in a box; organizations are closed system networks. Open system networks are networks in which the boundaries are not necessarily clear, for they are not in a box (Kadushin, 2012).

Social Networks are relied heavily upon in communities; a large reason is due to comfort and familiarity. If individuals have the ability to relate, then trust is sometimes granted from that. Families who are experiencing poverty will be more likely and willing to accept advice from someone that has experienced poverty. Propinquity can be broadly defined as being in the same place at the same time. There is a distinction between co-location, which puts people simply within range of one another, and co-presence, which

implies a social relationship that is within the framework of social institution or social structure (Zhao and Elesh, 2008). As it relates to this study, families who are non-native speakers often from the same country connect with each other in unique ways.

Sometimes they are connected by family members who do not reside in the area and often some connect through casual conversations. The larger the social network, the larger the resource access may become. Social Networks is the theoretical framework that guided this study, being identified during the stage of analysis. Social Network Theory is important because it provides a clear understanding of why some immigrants have not been made aware of what services are available to them.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand barriers that homeless immigrant and refugee families within St. Louis Public Schools face when attempting to access services that are provided by the school and within the community. The study's focus is on a documented immigrant family experience. A qualitative exploratory case study design was utilized to explore the following research questions:

- 1) What services/resources are families aware of? How did they learn of these services?
- 2) Which services are families utilizing/ not utilizing? Why or why not?
- 3) What is the experience of obtaining educational services/resources, housing, and other financial resources for an immigrant or refugee family experiencing homelessness?
- 4) What may school personnel do to assist with resources becoming more accessible for immigrant and refugee families?
- 5) What are challenges homeless immigrants face when interacting and requesting support from local schools or community agencies? How do they overcome these challenges?

Case Study Design

This study used a qualitative case study design. Cases are social phenomena or systems or processes that are defined by unique sets of characteristics (Creswell, 2007). The case in this study is the process of how a documented homeless immigrant family accessed resources and services. Being able to grasp the experiences of a homeless immigrant family attempting to access resources that are designed for all students can

provide valuable insights for practitioners seeking to reduce potential barriers to service uptake. An in-depth exploration of the experiences of a homeless immigrant family sheds light on barriers that school social workers and counselors may not currently be aware of.

The use of a case study allowed the investigator to generate a detailed description of experiences and explore how these experiences are shaped by the particular characteristics that define the case. For example, Avendano and Rivera (2015) used a case study to explore the way immigrants navigate the lack of legal status and work. The bigger phenomena would be the lack of ability to work if immigrants are not able to gain legal status. In this study, the experience of one family illustrated how programs and services provided through the education system and community are utilized (or not) beyond formal eligibility requirements.

Qualitative Research

Although case studies can use both quantitative and qualitative methods, the focus on subjective experiences and particular phenomena makes this type of design especially compatible with qualitative research methods. In contrast to quantitative studies (see table 1.1 in the appendix) which are aimed at generalizing to larger populations, the objective of qualitative research is to generate theoretical propositions that explain the phenomena with careful attention to the idiosyncrasies that define the case (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative research uses various methodologies but is in its essence a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Heppner, 2004). This approach is ideal for a study that aims to explore immigrant families' experience of homelessness, how they navigate the education and service provider systems when trying to access services and what kinds of obstacles they encounter along the way. Qualitative research typically draws on a set of interpretive methods that make the human experience

visible in the natural settings it unfolds. Such methods can include personal experience' introspections, life stories, interviews, artifacts, cultural texts and productions; as well as observations of interactions and behavior intended to capture how people make meaning of their experience (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992).

The focus of this study is on the experience of obtaining educational services/resources, housing, and other financial resources of an immigrant family experiencing homelessness in the St. Louis Public School District. In addition to how the family makes meaning of their experiences accessing resources. An exploratory qualitative case study was the best approach for such a study because an in-depth exploration of their experience has shed light on potential challenges and obstacles. The findings yield recommendations for community resource providers and school personnel of how to better support homeless immigrant and refugee families within St. Louis City.

Case Selection

The case selection was guided by a set of specific family characteristics such as immigrant status, length of time in the country, family composition and poverty. Furthermore, the family had to have been homeless in the recent past when it had at least one child enrolled in the St. Louis Public School District.

Homelessness

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is the first major federal initiative to address the problem of homelessness in America (Sandham, 2000). The law defines homelessness among children and youth as sharing the housing of others, living in emergency or transitional shelters, abandoned in hospitals, awaiting foster care

placement, living in public places not designed for regular sleeping accommodations for human beings or migratory children (McKinney-Vento Act, 2002, Section 725).

Based on this definition school districts are required by law to offer services to all families, regardless of citizenship status. These services include assistance with immediate school enrollment for all school-aged children with or without proper documentation (immunization records, birth certificates, occupancy permit, utility bills, etc.) and transportation for school-aged children whom are temporarily residing outside of the school district due to experiencing homelessness. In addition to these services, it is up to the discretion of each school district to provide additional services/resources that are not legally outlined in the description of the McKinney Vento Act. Saint Louis Public School District Youth in Transition Program offers family therapy, tutoring programs, housing referrals, parent training, job training, clothing closet shopping, school supplies, and monetary donations from agencies in the community. While refugee and documented immigrant families are eligible for all discretionary services, undocumented families may not be eligible for job training and housing support because parents will not be legally able to work or have the necessary documents to qualify for housing referrals. Even though Saint Louis Public School states that *all* families regardless of citizenship status are eligible for these services, undocumented families are at a disadvantage because although they are eligible, there is the inability to utilize the service due to their legal status. Immigrant and refugee parents are required to submit an intake at the school that their child attends by the School Social Worker or support staff in order to access these resources/services, unless the child is an unaccompanied youth.

Immigration Status

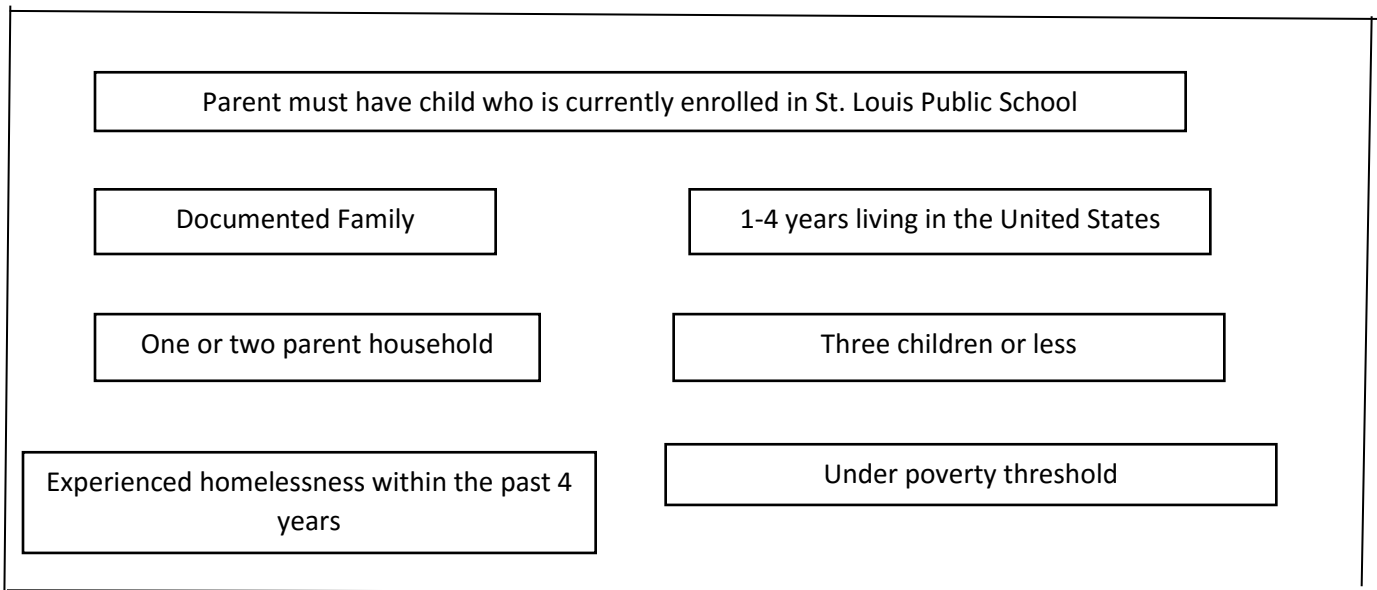
In this study one documented immigrant family was used. The parent was highlighted in the study because they are required to complete an intake before the family and their school-aged children are able to receive services from the school district. The identified family had at least one child enrolled in the Saint Louis Public School District. Documented immigrant families hold a visa and/or green card and are, at least formally, eligible to receive the mandated, as well as the discretionary services, provided under the McKinney Vento Act. While refugee families are also eligible to receive all services, they are also in a more privileged situation since they receive institutional support from local resettlement agencies for 90 days upon entry into the United States. Since the focus of this study was on how vulnerable immigrant families experiencing homelessness navigate the process of accessing services refugees may not be the most disadvantaged families. Undocumented immigrant families by contrast are arguably the most disadvantaged group of immigrants because they are structurally banned from accessing services. However, because their status prevents them from utilizing discretionary services provided by the school system, they may not be best suited to shed light on how immigrant families access these services. Although documented families do not have the ‘institutional hand holding’ that refugee families have, unlike undocumented families they are eligible and able to receive all services provided under the McKinney Vento Act.

Poverty and Household Composition

The family identified was homeless when it enrolled a child in SLPS. This allowed the researcher to determine if the participant was aware of services that the school district offers and if they had been utilized when the family was homeless. Also,

the participant discussed their experience when they were not receiving services. Since homelessness is most often an indicator of financial instability or poverty, the family income must be below the federal poverty guidelines. Table 1.2 in the appendix shows that, for example, for 1 parent with 1 child the poverty threshold would be \$22, 411 or less and for 2 parents with 1 child it would be \$28,180 or less etc.

Table 1.3
Characteristics of Case Selected Family



This research reflects a documented family who has been living in the United States between 1-4 years, with a one or two parent household who was homeless with three children or less, under the poverty threshold with children who enrolled in Saint Louis Public School District.

Length of time in the U.S.

Length of residence in the U.S. is important because it presumably affects language acquisition and the development of social networks. Less extensive family networks may indicate lesser access to knowledge about resources that are available to

them. In addition, the length of time that a family is in the United States matters in regards to language acquisition. According to Hakuta (2000) oral English proficiency takes 3-5 years to develop and academic English proficiency can take 4 to 7 years. The more English that the family speaks, the less disadvantaged they will be because of their ability to communicate and potentially comprehend. Language is reflective of the ability to access services or communicate the need for services due to experiencing homelessness.

In short, length of time in the United States matters because it indicates the degree of language acquisition and the extent of a family's social networks. Therefore, the family for this study has been in the U.S. between 1-4 years.

Table 1.3 provides a summary of the selection criteria for this study. The research used a documented immigrant family that is currently experiencing homelessness, is living in poverty, has been residing in the United States for 1-4 years and has at least one child currently enrolled in the St. Louis Public School District.

Respondent Recruitment Strategy

Upon completion of the IRB process, official paperwork was completed in order to conduct research about the experiences of a homeless immigrant family from the Saint Louis Public School District and interviewing staff members. Flyers were posted in the Students in Transition Office at 801 North 11th Street with consent from the homeless coordinator, Deidra Thomas-Murray. Referrals were received from support staff in the district with availability of potential participants. When potential participants reached out for more information, they were given detailed information in regards to the purpose of the study. One interview was conducted. Upon completion of the interview, the participant received a thank you card and \$40 gift card.

Data Collection Methods

This study used a semi-structured interview protocol for data collection. A semi-structured interview consists of a set of standard questions with several probes to get detailed descriptions or clarification of a person's reasoning (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to use larger topics to guide the conversation while also providing the flexibility to elaborate on emerging themes. A semi-structured interview guide was the best approach to explore experiences of homelessness and service access in the context of immigration while also being sufficiently open to discover unanticipated issues that may come up during the interview. While semi-structured interviews are formal conversations, the interview protocol is more of a thematic guide that directs the flow of the conversation. The interviewer followed the guide, but also followed topical trajectories in the conversation when she felt it appropriate (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2006). This flexibility provided the interviewee the opportunity to express their views and describe their experience of homelessness and service access in their own terms. The interview was recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

The interview transcript(s) was analyzed using an inductive approach (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) in order to illuminate how the family experienced homelessness and identified supports and barriers to service access. A codebook with initial codes was developed to code the interview, but these codes were continuously refined as important themes and issues emerged in the data. For example, homeless immigrant or refugee families had unaddressed traumatic experiences, lack of job knowledge, issues with

citizenship, family issues, or other social needs that influence their ability to access services. Qualitative computer software was used to code and recode the data. The interview data was anonymized and stored on a password-protected computer in order to protect the privacy of the family. This study is solely an exploratory study; based on the findings from this research the goal was to ensure that service access is equal for all populations regardless of demographic background.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how homeless documented immigrants access resources and highlight the resources that may or may not be available to them. This empirical section will restate the research questions, provide a brief overview of the participant Aida (one whom sacrifices herself for her people), provide an in depth exploration of themes found from the data, highlight barriers that Aida faced when attempting to access services and conclude with a summary of findings. Themes from the data that was obtained guided this empirical section and recommendations for next steps. The major themes based on the interview included adaptation, housing, institutions providing resources, family and community networks providing resources, and barriers to accessing needed resources for the family. This chapter goes into depth about how these themes are aligned with the literature and the initial research questions that guided this study.

Meet Aida

Aida is a 27-year-old female born and raised in Uzbekistan. Aida lived in a town by the name of Angren and spoke Uzbek language, a Turkic language, and Russian up until she pursued schooling that assisted her with learning British English. Aida had about nine years of English language training in which her parents were strong advocates in her learning, prior to coming to the United States. Aida attended grade school up until the age of 18. At age 20 she began to work for Korean Airlines as a flight cabin attendant, and years following she lived in South Korea for about 2 years to be a cabin attendant. Aida's life back home was comfortable; she had a good job and a lot of friends. Within her dating life, she enjoyed online dating due to demands she faced from her job. In 2012

she met her partner, now husband, through an online dating site. About 6 months into dating, Aida became pregnant with their son. Her partner decided to propose while home and promised her and their son a better life in the United States. Her husband became a legal citizen by completing preparation courses at the International Institute in 2013. Aida arrived in the United States along with her son in 2015 with a fiancée visa. The visa was approved due to the couple being engaged- with the intent to marry within that current year. Aida and her husband married in 2015 and hired a lawyer to complete legal documents for Aida and her son. By 2016 they became legal citizens.

Where is Everybody?

Prior to coming to the United States Aida had a preconceived vision of what she thought the city of St. Louis would look like. “I knew things from the movies. I imagined high buildings and busy streets. Then I came to St. Louis and was a little disappointed. On the movies it looks very beautiful, but when I came there were so many problems- even public transportation confusion and second I experienced a little discomfort because in the streets there was not a lot of people. In New York and Chicago there are a lot of people in the street and even when you want to ask someone something there is no people to ask. This was like a disappoint.” The expectation she had for the city was not fulfilled. Busy streets to her potentially signified unity and the ability to build connections easily. The city of St. Louis limited her exposure to others outside of her family network. When she arrived she saw no streets filled with people on the south side of St. Louis city streets. “No I wasn’t scared but when you see a lot of people its easier. In my home country the cities are very busy and it’s a lot of people in the street and all the neighbors in the neighborhood know each other. But here, I wasn’t scared but it looked strange.” Cultural adaptation is a complex process of adjustment in which daily experiences and individual,

familial, and community factors influence the quality of life of diverse immigrants (Reich, 2010). Aida has developed resilience as it relates to adjusting to things that are different from her community back home. Based on this strength, she is open to new things. The limited exposure to others may also limit her ability to form more meaningful relationships outside her family circle, which in turn may also affect the kinds of supports and resources she is able to access through her relationships.

Home Sweet Home

Aida and her family resided with her husbands' family in the south city of St. Louis for two years after arrival. Research shows that recent immigrants are more likely than more settled immigrants to live with extended families. Such arrangements more often involve lateral extension (for example, co-residence with a relative from a similar stage in the life course, such as a sibling) than vertical extension (co-residence of adults with their parents) because immigrants often leave older family members behind in the country of origin (Lamdale, 2011). The strategy of doubling up, common among recent immigrants, is defined as homelessness in the McKinney Vento Act. Aida and her husband lived near the Gravois Park area in south St. Louis with family members. This neighborhood has limited community involvement and has a high concentration of low-income families. Approximately 18 months after Aida and her son arrived in the United States Aida's husband was walking down the street in the afternoon after work near the home and was robbed at gunpoint. After this incident, the family moved further west.

Moving further west has placed great strain on their family stability, especially with Aida's husband only providing the income. Rent for the family has doubled now that they have moved into their own home. This move was initiated based on concerns for safety and has caused strain, pressure, and challenges for this single income family.

Along with the concern for safety, the family was also afforded the opportunity to experience a different neighborhood and its amenities. This new neighborhood continued to limit her ability to access institutional resources and interact with others outside of her familial network.

A previous study highlights that as each immigrant group gains a stronger foothold in the nation's social and economic structures, its members start moving to new neighborhoods that are often not only physically separate from the ethnic ghetto but also socially separate. As the upwardly mobile of the ethnic group leave the immigrant enclave, they are replaced by members of new immigrant groups, who need inexpensive places to live near their best options for employment (Rosembaum, 2007). In contrast, Aida and her husbands' experience did not reflect an increase in economic status but was primarily a response to concerns for safety, which effectively worsened their financial stability due to a sudden increase in their monthly expenditures.

Can institutions provide what I need?

In contrast to Aida's husband who arrived in St.Louis as a refugee, Aida was not able to utilize supports that the International Institute offered because she was not a refugee. Other institutions that provide support to non-refugee immigrants are Immigrant & Refugee women's program (teaches women basic English and practical living skills in the security of their own homes), Rise Together Ministries (offers job development programs, communal mentoring, counseling, and a clothing/furniture ministry), Places for People (mental health needs, assistance with benefits and links to translation services, and legal assistance), and St.Francis Community Services Southside Services (provides social services, mental health counseling, and youth programming). These services are

available for all non-refugee immigrants and offer different social services, but Aida was unaware that these institutional supports existed. She identified a language class that was available based on information she received from her husband. She then attended an institution to assist with areas that she felt were essential to adapt to society- language being one of them. Aida attended an English language learner class at a public school in Hazelwood a few months after her arrival. The course only offered supports for learning and practicing English and teaching how it is applicable within the workforce. The language learner course did not offer resources to Aida as it related to housing, financial hardships, or any social service support. With this class being offered to a variety of new coming families, it would be an avenue to disseminate reliable information to families. For example, Aida stated, “I wish I would have known more about the education system in the United States and I wish to know about Social Services. What Social Services do they have and what can the country provide to people that just came to the United States.” An informative course requiring participants to communicate using the English language could be an asset to the knowledge base of family members willing to learn what is offered to them. Aida was not offered this while participating in the language learner class.

Aida eventually stopped attending due to a lack of transportation. The public school in Hazelwood that offered the language learner course is approximately 30 miles away from Aida’s home. At the time of Aida participating in the language learner class, she was residing in South City. Within St. Louis City and the surrounding counties, public transportation consists of metro bus, train, taxi, or Uber/Lyft. All of these means of transportation involve researching where the nearest pick up location is or creating an

account to ensure safety for pick up. Aida was not familiar with public transportation in St. Louis; it was not a resource that her extended family utilized. The family relied heavily on carpooling for transportation. Due to the conflicting schedule with her husband Aida was forced to stop participating in the language learner course. Aida is able to comprehend English well if the speaker is slowly speaking and she is still learning how to communicate fluently. Language acquisition for immigrant adaptation is important for Aida due to the increased daily use of the English language. The lack of English proficiency has been blamed for numerous economic, and social problems encountered by immigrants (Espenshade, 1997). Economists argue that English proficiency is a form of human capital in the workplace, and that limited knowledge of English is associated with lower earnings (McManus, Gould, and Welch 1983; McManus 1985). Aida expressed her initial fear in finding employment due to not being a native speaker. “I worry that many people who doesn’t speak English don’t have enough opportunities to get useful information that are available to them. Personally if I say about myself, I’m worried about being able to find job in the future because I am not native speaker and I have to do a lot things to qualify for small job.”

Aida also fears not being able to assist her son with his schoolwork during his middle and high school years, because she may not understand the content. She studied the English language back home for about nine years, but teaches herself solely through watching films and listening to music in English. When working for Korean Airlines, bilingual language speaker candidates were placed at a hiring advantage. Aida working for Korean airlines for years has also assisted in developing her English language comprehension and verbal communication skills. Working for Korean Airlines, she

needed basic English communication skills, in which she now has upon her arrival in St. Louis, and she has since been seeking more fluency.

After enrolling her child in school, she was not able to get the full experience or ability to obtain resources due to her fear of asking questions. “He was in Kindergarten, it wasn’t difficult enrolling. I called the school and asked what documents I needed. I went to the school nearby where we lived and completed paperwork. The school was a couple of blocks over from where we lived.” Aida discovered this process via searching online- but randomly walking into a school building she possibly would not have received the same response. Aida was not offered supports during the enrollment process and she was not aware that any were available. “No, not really because I didn’t know there were any resources available. I just wanted him to be in school and I did not feel comfortable with asking.” Aida possibly did not perceive the school as a place where parents can access services. Various community development programs addressed the lack of basic needs for families in Uzbekistan, but school communities were not the primary source of resource connection. This is in part due to the fact that in Uzbekistan services are provided solely by the government and not by schools. This suggests a cultural difference as it relates to the institutions geared around educating children.

Aida was not offered support from school personnel to recognize or address the homeless situation. When enrolling her son in school, she provided a lease and utility bill that reflected her husband’s sister’s name. Traditionally if this information does not reflect the parents name, school personnel are supposed to ask parents if they are residing with a family member- this was not completed during the enrollment process. Since school personnel were not interviewed for this study it is not possible to explore why

families like Aida are not provided with information about resources dealing with homelessness. But the analysis does provide insights into why Aida did not perceive the school to be a place that, in addition to educating children, may also provide resources and supports addressing homelessness. Based on the family being homeless, school personnel are required to connect them with appropriate resources to support their basic and socioemotional needs. Aida did not utilize the abundant amount of resources that Saint Louis Public Schools had to offer because the school did not adequately communicate that these services were available to her and her family. These resources include but are not limited to employment training, housing search, parenting courses, furniture assistance, utility bill payment, first aid/CPR course reimbursement, transportation, and tutoring.

In Uzbekistan Aida was familiar with all community agencies that could assist her with social support services but Aida was not initially aware of community agencies in the United States that could assist with basic needs (utilities, food, or temporary shelter). “I know of places to support your family with extra. Like food banks and children’s supplies but I never used these services. I heard that some families use these services.” Aida indicated that these services provide extra, but for some families it may be all that they have. Aida cares about other people that need the support, so she would rather not take the “extra” for granted when someone else who is in need could benefit more than her and her family. She may choose to not utilize the services because she does not want to feel as if extra is being provided to her family. The hesitation may possibly be rooted from her new transition to the United States and she does not want her family to be

identified as being a new family in need. Often family and community networks were able to provide Aida with some support.

Are family and community networks beneficial?

When Aida arrived in the United States, she was uncomfortable because she lacked the support that she had back home. Immigrants face numerous stressors and barriers to establishing a new life in a new country. They often experience a diminishing amount of social supports, leaving behind family and friends in their native countries (Flaskerud & Winslow, 1998). She came to the United States and felt very lonely, even with her husband's big family in the city. Aida did not know her husband's family, but built a relationship with them fairly quickly. The relationship was facilitated by the need of English translation for them in various settings. Over time when Aida began interacting with this small close-knit community, the feeling of being homesick disappeared.

The number of Uzbek immigrants arriving in St. Louis has been on the rise in recent years. Zakirov (2015) estimates about 200 Uzbeks, in about 50 families live in the St. Louis area. Currently there is no information highlighting education levels and socioeconomic status within this small community. The U.S. Census Bureau does not provide information related to this ethnic category so that we can better understand how diverse families can be served. The U.S. Census Bureau identifies the Uzbek population as Asian. Although there is a community, Aida believes there is no support like the support that is granted from immediate family. Aida believes that family support is most important.

As stated previously, there is a small representation of Uzbeks in St. Louis-making Russians the next group of familiarity. People tend to be drawn to others who are similar to themselves. This matters because when there is a community, people within that community will be more willing to obtain information as it relates to resources from people they can relate to or think has had similar experiences as them. A person will choose to interact with another whose activities conform to his own norms and values or with someone who occupies a shared status (Breton & Pinard, 1960). Based on the interview, Uzbeks find comfort in seeking assistance or guidance from Russians. “When my husband arrived, he became close with a wealthy family from Russia and began to work for their logistics company.” Both Aida and her husband worked for a logistics company that the family recommended them to; the majority of workers spoke Russian- a language they were familiar with. Aida’s husband was working for the company initially and when Aida came to the United States, she began doing clerical work for the company. Family and community networks thus provided information about employment and other resources. McKenry (2005) found that religion, spirituality, ethnic communities and enclaves, shared cultural values, and informal and formal social support can serve as resources that aid immigrant families in adaptation.

Aida met this Russian family in church and became connected because they were of a similar cultural background. These two families are of different economic status, which means that Aida and her husband were able to get jobs through them. Strong ties have been formed from these group similarities, which have led Aida to seek help in accessing resources available to her. The communities of Russians were primarily wealthy and only provided a job for Aida and her husband. This social network did not

provide Aida with information about social services and resources that will provide Aida and her family with “extra”.

This network of people has assisted Aida and her family with their transition, but this network has a similar background as Aida. “Some people from my home country that live here they came as refugees as well. For like big holidays like New Year’s we would visit and make party.” Aida’s family and people that she does not know that are from her home country establishing a relationship without knowing a lot about each other is an example of a social network. According to the social network perspective, there is less importance put on characteristics of the individual, but rather it is the relationship of ties within the network that is important (Newman, 2003). Aida has no background knowledge of this newly met family from Uzbekistan, but she utilizes and accepts advice. “Yes, they gave me good suggestions. For example, when I was pregnant they would say, go to this hospital. They were very helpful.” It is common within the Uzbekistan culture to help each other, Aida found comfort in receiving help and advice due to cultural expectations that both families have been traditionally used to. This social network of another family from Uzbekistan only provided Aida with information pertaining to healthcare, but not about homeless supports or social services. This family may not have been able to provide homeless supports because of cultural beliefs around living with family members; not being defined as being homeless. The benefit of strong ties, characterized by mutual trust and solidarity, is that they tend to grant emotional and instrumental support and promote collaboration. However, it is the relationships with weaker ties that tend to provide access to new and different information that can result in upward mobility (Hurtado-de-Mendoza, 2014). Weak ties are those that will benefit Aida

during her process of attempting to access resources that will support her family. Weak ties are the less personal relationships that she should be able to build with members of her child's school community and others. Granovetter (1973) suggests that in such situations stress is laid on the usual cohesive power of weak ties. Aida has not been able to form weak ties and stress is rooted from not knowing how to build these weak ties. This has left Aida without the ability to access resources that she needs for her family.

Aida was faced with many barriers that limited her ability to obtain the support that she needed for her family. These barriers consisted of:

- Immigrants not considering themselves homeless due to cultural differences.
- Immigrants not aware of the McKinney-Vento Act and government mandated services that are provided by school communities.
- School personnel not ensuring that ALL families are aware of what is available to them when experiencing homelessness.
- International Institute not being a support due to her not being a refugee.
- Language programs only providing courses in learning English.
- Family networks providing information about jobs but not social service resources.
- Co-ethnic networks providing information about healthcare services but not social support resources.
- Hesitancy to inquire or request information about what resources are available.

- Government or school support not being valued within a collectivist culture.

Aida was unaware that there are community resources that can support her family with bill payment assistance, food, housing, clothing, etc. “I never used places to support my family with extra. Like food banks and children supplies. I heard that some families use those services, but we have not.” Economically Aida and her family are below the poverty line due to her husband being the only source of income with a gross of approximately \$25,000 annually. If Aida wanted to utilize a resource, it would be difficult for her to become knowledgeable due to her being unaware of what is available. Aida has found it difficult to navigate through systems, and has relied heavily on the Internet and Youtube for answers. Studies have shown that the use of Youtube in its various forms has improved students oral, aural, and writing skills (Brook, 2011). Her ability to use technology is a resource that she utilizes to assist with her limited language skills. When Aida and her husband had a baby girl 2 years ago, she became a stay at home mom, furthering her sense of isolation even more. The relationship with her in-laws also began to subside due to the new demands placed on becoming a new parent and moving to St. Louis County.

Aida enjoys interacting with individuals that can possibly support her, but she fears asking question to receive the support she needs. “In my home country it’s very different from here. Here you have to be very independent and there you get guidance and help. Even here you can’t ask people anything but back home you can ask for help/support.” Uzbekistan has a collective culture of supporting each other, even strangers. In recent studies the United States, Canada, and Western European countries

were found to be high on the individualistic end of the dimension. Asian, Latin American, and African nations were found to be high on the collectivistic side of the dimension (Kim, 1995). Aida points out that in contrast to the individualistic culture of the United States, Uzbekistan is more of a collectivist culture. Within the United States there is a culture of independence and figuring things out on your own. This different type of culture has affected adaptation for Aida. Collectivistic cultures may be more inclined to provide mutual support compared to individualist cultures. (Kim, 1995). Triandis (1994) notes that in groups in collectivistic cultures tend to be few and long-standing. Aida specifically is not used to being apart of a certain group because within her culture, everyone fosters helping each other.

Aida strives on independence, which is very much what the expectation in an individualistic culture would be, but without the knowledge of how and where to get the institutional supports that are available – in part because she is afraid to ask. “Sometimes I have some questions if I try to learn about something, I just google it and learn online. I don’t ask for help because sometimes I don’t want to look annoying, if you want to ask for help from someone. Sometimes I don’t want to look stupid. I like old people because they are more willing to help. If I want to learn something I learn myself, through online sources and if I really need someone to hear it from I just type the phone number and call to ask.” Aida is adjusting to the demands of a society that is traditionally centered on self-fulfillment and self-gains. Aida did not indicate if the people in where she sought services had a certain attitude towards her lack of knowledge of what is available to her.

Aida’s family and community network has only provided her with supports that were centered around her basic well-being (healthcare, social life, religion, and

immediate job placement). This network could provide Aida with information related to education, financial assistance, mental health resources, career advancement, or community activity offerings, all things that are supposed to be provided under the McKinney Vento Act. Aida is more likely to receive this information from institutions, but institutions must deliberately offer this information to those who fear requesting it. It is important for immigrant families to know what is offered to them within institutions so the information can then be disseminated to the community networks they are a part of.

What does the future look like?

“I’m worried about America. All people say America is a rich country but I worry because there are a lot of people in hunger because of low income of their families. I worry that many people who doesn’t speak English don’t have enough opportunities to get useful information that are available to them. Personally, if I say so myself, I’m worried about being able to find a job in the future because I am not native speaker and I have to do a lot of things to qualify for a small job.” Aida has valid reasons to worry; her perception of the United States has changed now that she has lived here. Aida is interested in pursuing higher education so that she can help her family and those that have similar experiences. Aida doesn’t understand or know the steps in pursuing higher education and that is a struggle that several of our immigrant families face--- how to pursue goals when you may not even know the questions to ask. Aida suggests that something should be done about the unknown. “I would suggest that for parents of immigrant children to create a package of how to manage their bills. Guidance on how to use social services, how to find interpreters, how to find doctors, etc. I think it will be very helpful for when they first come to the United States. If they don’t speak English,

translate their package into their native language to help them understand everything. Give them a list of services. Language services and others.”

Summary

Aida came to the United States from Uzbekistan seeking the opportunity for her family to live a better life. Her perception and experiences were quite different from what she actually encountered. Aida assumed that she would meet different people from her day-to-day interactions and be financially stable along with her husband. Aida and her family resided with family members. According to statutory definitions she is homeless, but she herself does not see herself as being homeless. She received recommendations from people that she was familiar with about how to address and deal with certain situations and challenges that life brings. The people that Aida interacts with that are unfamiliar may possibly provide Aida the opportunity to prosper and learn new things. When Aida enrolled her son in school, she was not aware that the school provides services to those that are homeless based on the McKinney Vento Act. Aida did not feel the need to utilize services that were offered by school support staff because she feels her family does not need “extra”. She also feared requesting necessary support and asking questions about various systems due to the response that she may possibly get from members working within the community. Aida fears her children growing older due to the lack of knowledge that she has surrounding the English language and math skills. Although Aida is not a natural born United States citizen she fears what the future may bring because of the crime that her family has been exposed to in addition to several people that she visibly sees living in extreme conditions of poverty.

Research suggests that upon arrival some immigrants face challenges that predispose them to poverty. This aligns with the findings from this study. Aida worked

for a Russian logistics company that paid low wages and eventually she quit due to conflicting schedules with her husband. Prior studies also suggested that employment could determine if immigrant families will thrive. Although Aida was forced to quit her job, her husband continued to work to provide for the family. Aida was not familiar with federal and state services and was not aware of the eligibility guidelines. All of these factors predispose immigrant families to poverty.

Aida's family came to the United States with the intent to live with family members in order to financially prepare them to be independent. Several immigrant families practice the same strategy. There are immigrant families that come readily prepared to secure housing independently, but social issues such as sudden unemployment, low incomes, unfamiliarity with housing searches, domestic violence, and health issues can lead them to becoming homeless unexpectedly. The literature stated that social and family networks may be the key determinants of access to, and use of, a range of services among immigrants living in urban areas. The results from this study show that social networks are important for resource access within communities. Although there is a gap in the literature that outlines how immigrant and refugees have access to community resources, these results show that a tool should be designed so that immigrant families can learn how to navigate through systems that are designed for people who do not have generational knowledge of them.

Immigrant families lack the type of generational knowledge about institutional support that is more likely to exist in native families; thus institutional connections and network resources become critical for new arrivals. Immigrant parents must be willing to ask questions to learn, but as this study shows fear may prevent them from doing so. You

also cannot utilize what you do not know is available. It is the job of the school personnel to ensure that all families are aware of what services are provided, especially if a family is doubled up and living with family members. Although this study did not highlight the experiences of school personnel, they have a large impact on resource access. This is a component that will be explored in future studies. Addressing barriers to accessing resources is essential so that families can be successful financially, socially, mentally, and physically. Barriers to accessing resources for Aida; a homeless documented immigrant family within this study that were found consist of:

- Immigrants not considering themselves homeless due to cultural differences.
- Immigrants not aware of the McKinney-Vento Act and services that are provided by school communities.
- School personnel not ensuring that families are aware of what is available to them when experiencing homelessness.
- International Institute not being supports for non-refugee immigrant families.
- Language programs only providing courses surrounding learning English and no information about other services.
- Family networks providing information about jobs but not social service resources.
- Co-ethnic networks providing information about healthcare services but not social support resources.

- Hesitancy to inquire or request information about what resources are available.

The identification of these barriers are important so that professionals can better understand how to enhance practice when working with vulnerable populations. Resource access for immigrant families is key to ensuring that families have everything that they need to be safe and successful so that in turn children are able to excel academically now and in the future.

CHAPTER 5: LIMITATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Limitations

This study only represents one immigrant family's experience and there are several different experiences within St. Louis. From one story we are able to learn how important community networks are for adjustment. While one story cannot tell us everything about resource access for an immigrant family, this study showed how people of familiarity connect with each other and how sometimes these connections do not provide everything they need to be successful while adapting to a new culture. Although school institutional supports are available, sometimes they also do not provide families with everything they need. These institutions provide foundational information, but not concrete tools that immigrant families can utilize to build stepping-stones to success. Institutions sometimes fail to understand where people are in regard to their adjustment by making assumptions about what is needed. They also may not be aware of how people learn about the supports and services they offer. Needs may vary by immigrant group and systems and professionals cannot be expected to be prepared for the specific needs of every potential group of immigrants. This study did not provide insight for the following groups:

- Non-English speaking immigrants
- New immigrant without a family
- Undocumented immigrant family
- Immigrant family with a learning disability

This one study also showed that sometimes educational professionals provide different experiences and/or resources for different families and that should not be the

situation if we are doing all that we can to support disadvantaged families. This one story also did not grant the opportunity to learn about how documented immigrants with no knowledge of the English language find supports to address needs. How do families who are unaware of institutions and have limited family/friends in a new environment figure out where to get support?

This study focused on one documented homeless immigrant family but there are families who are undocumented. This research did not shine light on barriers that undocumented families face when attempting to access services. This population is at a higher disadvantage due to their lack of legal status and several organizations not being able to provide supports as a result. There may also be educational practitioners that limit conversations with undocumented families about their needs, because these families already fear their safety and risk of deportation.

Initially, critical race theory was the proposed theoretical framework guiding this study. Critical race theory suggests that racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that white people create between “races” to maintain elite white interest in labor markets and politics and, as such, create the circumstances that give rise to poverty and criminality in many minority communities. Resources not being accessible by certain disadvantaged populations due to systems that have been designed by those of power and privilege is an example. Those who design these systems to access resources have never experienced the struggle of going without, so how are they able to determine what is beneficial to a population of people who are experiencing poverty? Although this theory aligns with the study, after the data was analyzed, social network theory was shown to be a more relevant theory guiding this study. The majority

of the themes from the data were centered on social networks providing or not providing the participant with what she needed to be successful.

This case study is evidence for more research to be conducted in the future surrounding the topic of equality. There was difficulty in obtaining a family residing in a homeless shelter due to different layers of fear. Arguably, families doubling up are actually a very common coping strategy among immigrant families. Aida was recruited by obtaining information about the study from a family that utilized services provided by Students In Transition previously. Aida then called and indicated that she was interested in becoming a participant of the study.

In this study there was a small language barrier that existed between the interviewee and the researcher. Some statements that were made by the interviewee were misunderstood and the researcher put the responses into context. During the interview there seemed to be a sense of discomfort because the researcher was using the language “homeless” but the interviewee ensured that she did not want to be identified as homeless due to cultural differences. School personnel were not interviewed to support some content in the research questions. This is important because school personnel are important as it related to resources access for homeless families. The recommendation for future studies consists of interviewing school personnel to inquire about their experience providing homeless immigrant families resources and the possible outcomes of the referrals.

My role as a professional social worker possibly had an impact on what the participant disclosed. What she disclosed was based on the fact that she knew I was a school social worker. This participant often paused and sometimes corrected the

information that she provided. It was noticed that she provided clarity often, when clarity was not requested. It seemed as the interviewee wanted to provide the positive and negatives of her experiences during the interview. During the interview only the interviewer and participant was in the room and she was reassured that her responses would not be associated with her identity. A family who utilized services that the school had recommended this participant to partake in the study. The researchers' experience as a school social worker has provided a similar insight that the results of this study have shown. The results were slightly expected due to conversations within the school environments that are served. Resource access for some homeless natural born citizens and immigrant families has been difficult due to the family's lack of education. It has been brought to light that several parents lack basic reading skills to read through a resource brochure that is provided within social service agencies. Now serving a diverse group of immigrant families, I automatically assumed that they are aware of supports, especially with several receiving transitional support from the International Institute. This study shows that all institutions should be working together to ensure basic needs are met for families as it relates to housing, financial support, safety, employment opportunities. Based on these results, we see that families simply do not always learn about services that are available.

In order to protect against analytic bias, the empirical section was presented at a qualitative research workshop at the University of Missouri- St.Louis where the researcher received feedback. Some initial bias identified included immigrants not being receptive to utilizing resources because they fear personal information being discovered, and assumption that the interviewees' husband received endless support for adaptation. I

expected to learn of barriers that limit resource access for this one documented immigrant family. It was surprising to learn that some institutions are not providing documented immigrant families all of the resources and information that they need for their families to be successful. It is also surprising that family and community networks lack detailed information as it relates to social service supports within the community.

Next Steps

Know and communicate the definition of student homelessness at time of enrollment

It is imperative for school personnel to communicate what student homelessness consists of when families are attempting to enroll their children. School personnel, specifically school secretaries whom are responsible for enrolling children should carry out the McKinney Vento Act out to fidelity and ask basic questions surrounding where you live and whom do you live with prior to completing enrollment paperwork. If their response reflects one of the following (1) Doubled up with another family (2) Living in a shelter (3) living in a car, park, or abandoned building (4) living in a motel or hotel (5) living alone as minor without an adult/unaccompanied youth then a Students in Transition Intake should be completed, explaining services that the office provides. Social Workers should be responsible for connecting these families, along with others with appropriate resources based on the lack of need. Lack of needs for families consist of but are not limited to housing, financial insecurities, food insecurities, affordable healthcare, affordable dentistry, mental health treatment, utility/bill payment assistance, and language translation services. This will be accomplished by doing the following:

1. All school secretaries participate in a mandatory professional development offered in July outlining what the McKinney Vento Act is and how their role during the enrollment process is crucial to identifying homeless families.
2. As families are identified school secretaries refer families to the school social worker. The school social worker then provides the family with basic information and conducts a needs assessment for the family. Based on the results from the needs assessment, the school social worker sends out community referrals based on the family's need.

Offering services but using different terminology

Cultural differences may cause immigrants to be reluctant to use services that are provided. If alternative names are used to describe services provided then immigrants may be more willing to utilize them. Instead of services being labeled as homeless services, they should be labeled as housing support or assistance. The following chart provides a few suggestions of other alternative names based on support that may be provided from institutions:

Program names institutions use Alternative program names to use

Rent Assistance	Monthly Rent Support
Utility Assistance	Electricity Support, Gas Support
Job Training	Skills Training
Christmas Adoption Programs	Extra Support Program
Section 8 Housing Program	Housing to meet family needs
Emergency Food	Extra Food
Thanksgiving Baskets	Extra Food
Homeless services	Housing Support or assistance

Resource access app highlighting navigating through systems

A resource access application is created via Apple and Google Play Store. This resource access application will be separated into two different portals. The first portal is

geared towards natural born US citizens and the second part of the portal is geared towards immigrant families. This division is based on what the study suggested as it relates to the type of knowledge that each group has. Natural born citizens tend to have some knowledge of government social systems and supports but immigrant and refugee families have not had this same experience.

The portal focusing on immigrant resources will provide detailed information pertaining to how to navigate through systems. Often times there is a breakdown within systems for people to obtain things that they need. For example, the Section 8 housing program has a waiting list and families need to be made aware of how to check the status of their Section 8 housing application. Applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance and Missouri Medicaid is a process and individuals who are not familiar with the program should be provided with step by step directions to ensure they receive the support they need. This resource access application can then be introduced within institutions and provided to gatekeepers within immigrant communities. This will be accomplished by partnering with a community action agency and participating in the following:

1. Interview 20 immigrant parents and 20 natural born citizen parents requesting information pertaining to what are current basic needs for each family, what are current gaps in knowledge pertaining to social welfare systems, and questions pertaining to technology expertise.
2. A school social work task committee will then meet with the community action agency to review results of the interviews

3. The resource access application will be designed by this researcher or school personnel and piloted by a new immigrant family.
4. If resource access application displays positive outcomes based on feedback, it will be presented to local school districts for use by school social workers.

Institutions integrating resources curriculum

Immigrants are exposed to opportunities that provide foundational knowledge. Several of these opportunities are English language courses, job training, and school enrollment. These opportunities can provide immigrants with the information that they need to be successful. If a language course is offered, the course content can be designed around navigating through resources in St. Louis using the English language. This course will be a tool that newcomers could use along with carrying out its purpose in learning and practicing the English language. The assignments that are offered through these courses can be centered around resources. Writing prompts might consist of applying for available housing within communities of interest and completing resources applications. These are examples of how foundational programs can integrate resource access into their curriculum. This can be carried out by:

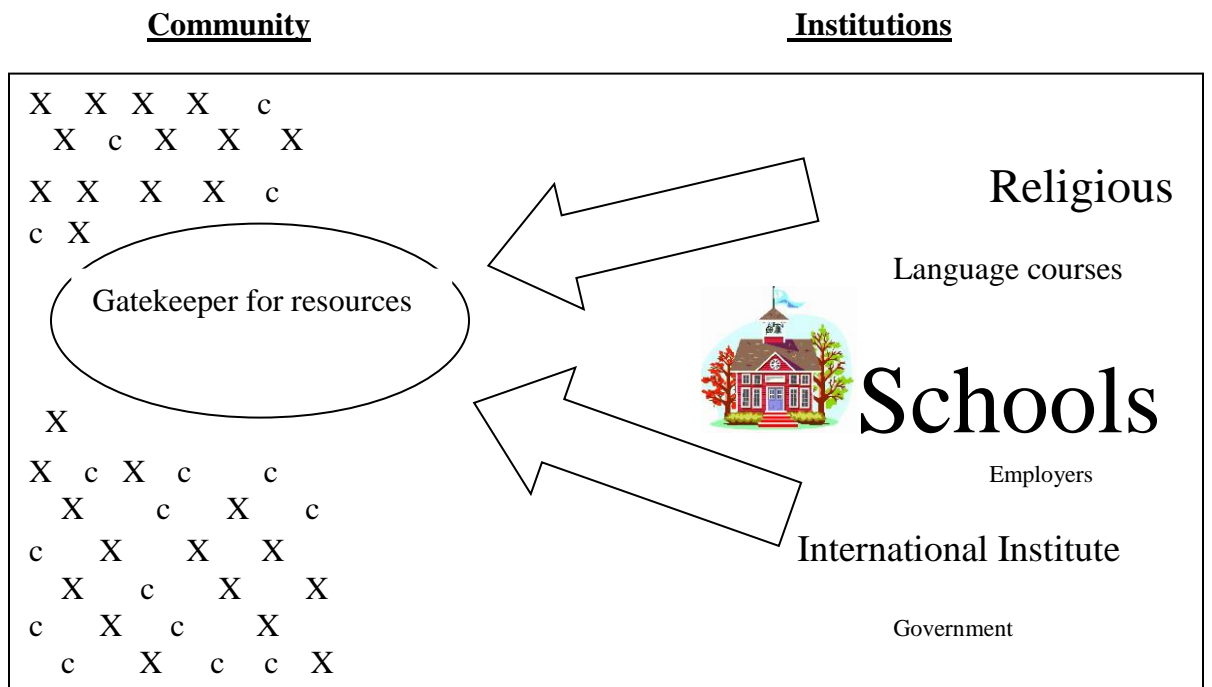
1. Language courses directors meeting with public housing administration to learn of what housing programs are available to immigrant and refugee families.
2. When language course directors and instructors are trained on housing programs they then take the application received and integrate it into their curriculum
3. Curriculum will be focused on reading, writing, obtaining letter of recommendations, and other necessary documents to apply for housing.

4. Last step is to follow up with the housing program to inquire about the status of the application.

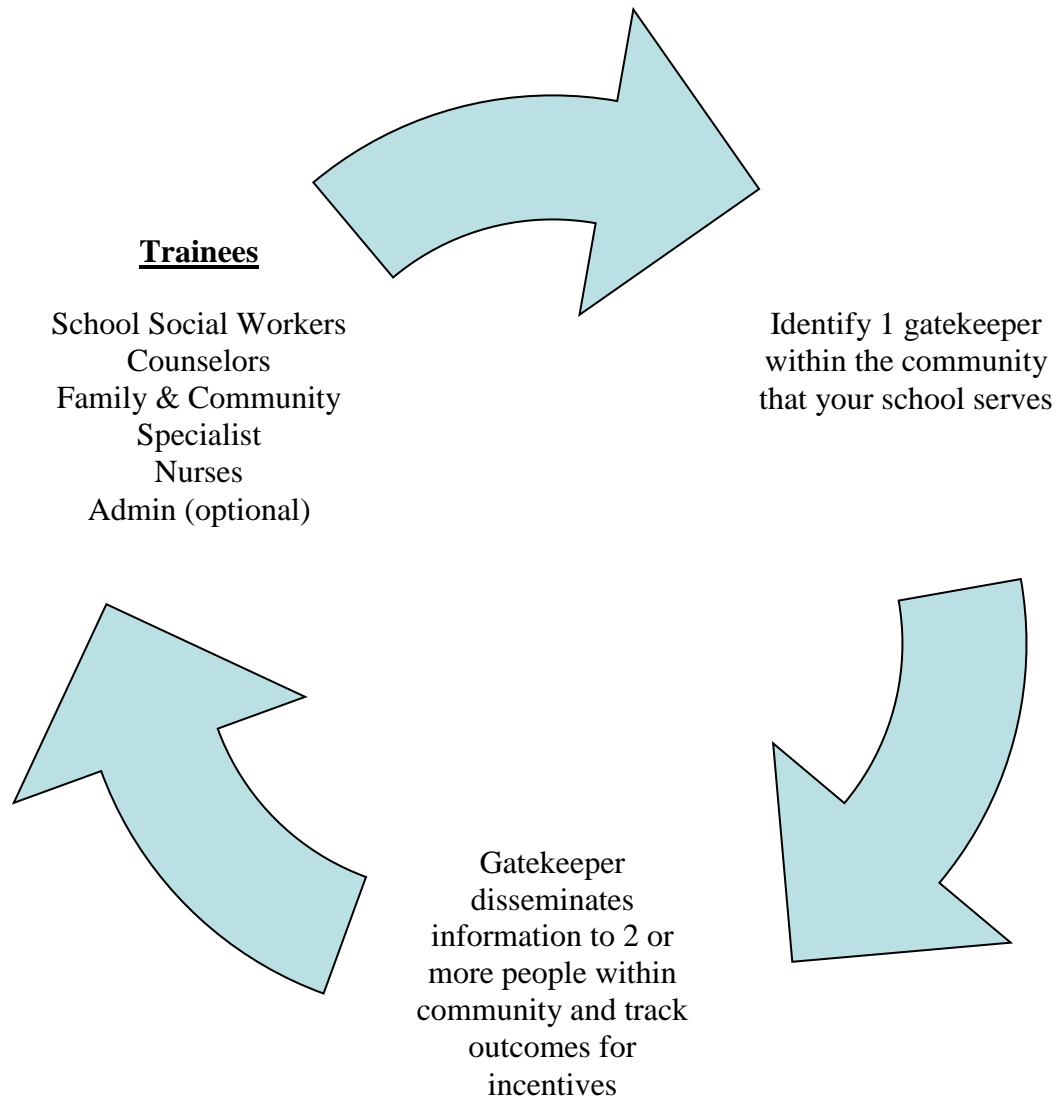
5. Prior to completion of the language course, this task must be completed in entirety.

Gatekeepers within communities being educated about resources

Gatekeepers of information within communities are valuable resources. They often are able to disseminate important information to the community that they are a part of, and possibly serve as an educational advocate. If Social Workers are provided resource information through a single short professional development, they can give this information to the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper can then distribute the information to the community and track outcomes, providing a training opportunity for them and accountability. The following graphics shows how this can be done:



X- Adults within the community
 c- Children within the community



Steps to accomplishing this:

1. School Social Workers, Counselors, Nurses, and School Principals participate in professional development providing detailed strategies on how to identify community gatekeepers.
2. Each support staff member within the school community identify a community gatekeeper and meet to discuss.

3. All identified community gatekeepers within the school district are contacted and invited to become part of the initiative, being compensated under grant funding.
4. All gatekeepers are provided training on school personnel roles and resources that are provided within the local community.
5. Gatekeeper keeps tracker of interactions with people within community and tracks outcomes.

Immigrants being hired into roles where people can obtain information

Most professional roles require some form of professional development or higher education, especially when participating in direct practice. Another recommendation is to place immigrants in roles where they can help others obtain resources. People tend to relate and receive information from those whom they are similar to. If immigrants are placed in roles to disseminate information, then resource access will be easier for newcomer homeless families. The downfall to this suggestion is that most organizations do not have the funding means to hire additional workers that will provide the same information that a base worker will provide. Advocacy for this will be essential and research surrounding networks can support the validity of this suggestion. This can be accomplished first by school social workers and counselors advocating the importance of having support staff that specialize in working with immigrant and refugee families. Parents within the community then become advocates. Community partners serving immigrant families then become advocates. When enough voices are being heard, then the school district will be more willing to consider designing two new positions that require applicants to have an immigrant or refugee background. These potential employees will work closely with schools that have a high immigrant and refugee

population. Tracking outcomes of families being served by the new roles will show the importance.

Schools are sometimes the first institution that immigrants encounter so it is important for school personnel to ensure comfort and provide families with what they need. Needs differ by family, but when a family is homeless regardless of their cultural beliefs resources should be offered and follow up should be provided. Resource access is important to ensure that all basic needs are met for immigrants. Immigrants bring diversity into our schools and communities and help us become culturally competent. When culturally competent, you are able to step into unfamiliar communities, understand, and make an impact. A piece of global education is implementing substantial systematic change to an issue, the issue at hand is addressing immigrant homeless. With awareness of the severity of this issue, professionals can work together to ensure that resources are provided and utilized.

Appendix

Table 1.1**Qualitative Research vs. Quantitative Research**

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Understand phenomena in depth within specific contexts	Determine relationships between variables
Text or other non-numerical data	Numerical data
Study things in natural settings	Context free
Research instrument of the study	Survey instrument measures
Interpretivist	Positivist/Post Positivist
Inductive	Deductive
Smaller sample sizes	Larger or multiple samples
Themes are identified from data that is collected	Themes help develop testable hypotheses

**Figure 1.2
Federal Poverty Level**

	FEDERAL POVERTY LEVELS					
2019	138%	150%	200%	250%	300%	400%
Size of Household	138%	150%	200%	250%	300%	400%
1	\$16,753	\$18,210	\$24,280	\$30,350	\$36,420	\$48,560
2	\$22,715	\$24,690	\$32,920	\$41,150	\$49,380	\$65,840
3	\$28,676	\$31,170	\$41,560	\$51,950	\$62,340	\$83,120
4	\$34,638	\$37,650	\$50,200	\$62,750	\$75,300	\$100,400
5	\$40,600	\$44,130	\$58,840	\$73,550	\$88,260	\$117,680
6	\$46,561	\$50,610	\$67,480	\$84,350	\$101,220	\$134,960
7	\$52,523	\$57,090	\$76,120	\$95,150	\$114,180	\$152,240
8	\$58,484	\$63,570	\$84,760	\$105,950	\$127,140	\$169,520



University of Missouri St. Louis

Interview Protocol

Researcher: Antaniece Sills, Doctoral Student in the College of Education

A. Introduction

Good Morning/Afternoon. My name is Antaniece Sills and I am the Principal Investigator for the study. As stated previously the purpose of this research is to explore reasons why documented immigrants become homeless and how they get services. Just a reminder that all of the information that you provide will remain confidential. Upon completion of the interview you will receive two \$50 Visa gift cards for your time. Before we begin is it ok for me to conduct a sound check?

The questions will revolve around general themes and these themes consist of Migration History, Adjustment/Adaptation to St.Louis, and Resource Networks.

B. Theme: Migration History

Ok, before we talk about how/why you came to St.Louis, I would like to talk a little about your life in your home country.

1. To start can you tell me about where you are from?

- Tell me about your job or work history in your home country. What did you do?
- Was your life comfortable? Why or why not?

2. Can you tell me what happened that made you leave?

- Why did you come to the United States?
- How did you end up in St.Louis?
- Who did you bring to St.Louis with you? Why?

3. Describe what you knew about the United States prior to coming here. Was it true? Explain.

4. What was the process like to come to St. Louis for you and your family?

- How long did it take?
- How did you feel about coming here?
- Upon arrival, how did you feel welcomed into the community?

5. Do you remember the moment when you first arrived here? What was the first thing you noticed?

- What did you notice to be the biggest difference between St. Louis and your home country?

Now that we have talked about your experiences coming to the United States/St.Louis, we will explore your experience adjusting to the culture of St.Louis and access to resources that have been made available to you.

C. Theme: Adjustment/ Adaptation to St.Louis

6. What was your experience since arrival with work and housing?

Probe for information about current housing and financial status.

- How did you find work and gain information about potential job opportunities?
- How did you obtain information about housing and who assisted you with this process?
- Has there been a time since you have come here and things were a bit tight? What happened?
- Where there actual moments you did not have a home? How did that make you feel?

7. What networks (people that have helped/supported you) do you have in St.Louis? What does this support consist of?

Probe for information about kinship networks and resources within the community and school system.

- How did you learn of the school system?
- What were the challenges with enrolling your child in school and who assisted with overcoming these challenges?
- Who was most helpful during the school enrollment process? How was that person helpful? What information was provided to you that you were not previously aware of?
- What did you learn from the school community that could assist you within your home?

This is valuable information about how you adjusted to St.Louis and your experience finding work, housing, and enrolling your child(ren) in school. Resources that are available has a lot to do with adjusting to a new environment, so now I will ask a few questions about community supports and resources that you have been made aware of or used.

8. Describe community supports/resources that you have utilized thus far. What impact has these services made on your family?

- What types of services/resources do you use more than others?
- How do you become knowledgeable of what is available to you?
- Describe your worst experience accessing services? Why was this experience unfavorable?
- Describe the differences between the resources you were given from your child's school enrollment process and those you have access independently without the support from your child's school community.

D. Reflection

9. When you think about your experience of leaving your home country, coming to St.Louis, starting a new life and some of the challenges you have experienced.... How do you feel about your experience?

- Probe for things that participant wish that would have known prior to coming. Probe for differences within housing markets in St.Louis vs. home country.

10. In light of your experience, how do you feel about your future here in St.Louis?

- What are some of things that you are worried about?
- Where do you see yourself and your family in 5-10 years?

When you think about everything we talked about (the transition to a new country, accessing school and community resources, job opportunities, and housing) is there anything else that we did not talk about that you think would be important for me to understand your experience?

Thank you so much for sitting down with me and sharing your experience of coming to St.Louis.

Interview Transcription

Interviewer: Ok; so as I have discussed before my name is AS and I am the principal investigator for this study. The purpose of the research is to explore reasons why documented immigrants experience homelessness as defined by US department of housing along with information about service access. Just a friendly reminder that all the information that is provided will remain confidential and only for research purposes. Umm ok, so before we talk about how and why you came to St.Louis, let talk a little about your life in your home country. Can you tell me a little about where you are from?

Participant: I am from Uzbekstan ummm it is in central Asia, it is very close to Russia and I came to St.Louis in 2015. I married my husband from the same country as me, but he came here 13 years ago. Many people confuse Pakistan and Uzbekstan but they are two different countries.

Interviewer: They sound similar but are different. How do you spell it may I ask?

Participant: U-Z-B-E-K-S-T-A-N. Um yeah and my child was born in 2012 and now he is in the 1st grade.

Interviewer: And your husband was here? Do you remember what year your husband arrived?

Participant: Yes, he came here in 2005, came back home to visit and I got pregnant.

Interviewer: So did he come for work?

Participant: No, he came here as a refugee. So after marriage I came here.

Interviewer: Did you all marry back home?

Participant: Yes, no we were engaged there and we married here. This year was difficult time for adaptation because the culture is different and I had a small knowledge of English. It has been difficult for me to understand slang in American culture. In my country we study British English. British English is different.

Interviewer: So back home, did you work?

Participant: Back home I worked in a airport and I worked as a cabin attendent. I also worked for Korean airlines. I lived in South Korea for about 2 years to be a cabin attendent. After marriage I came here.

Interviewer: Now you are here doing great things. So to recall correctly, you both married in your home country?

Participant: No, we were engaged in our home country and we married here.

Interviewer: So would you describe your life as comfortable back home? In terms of working and providing.

Participant: My life was more comfortable back home than when I came here. I had a good job and I had a lot of friends. New home new country and back home your family is there and I had all the support I needed. Then when I came here I felt very lonely and my husband has a big family. He has 6 brothers and their wives and children but even I did not know them well at that time.

Interviewer: Did they come refugee status as well?

Participant: Yes they did. My husbands whole family came as refugees.

Interviewer: Ok

Participant: So at first I was homesick. I did not have any job because I needed to wait for my immigration documents.

Interviewer: So it was difficult for you to find employment when you first arrived?

Participant: Yeah and the culture and language is different. I understood a little but not a lot. I had found struggle and everything was new. The first year was kind of hard but the past few years I had to get used to it.

Interviewer: You came here to reconnect with your husband and you all married here. He had family here but did you have family here?

Participant: No I don't have any family here. My parents and my brother, and all of my cousins are back in my home country.

Interviewer: Do you speak with them often?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: What form of communication do you use to connect with them?

Participant: We use Skype and phone

Interviewer: So what made you leave? I know you noted that you wanted to reconnect with your husband. Is there any other reason that made you want to come to the United States?

Participant: Yes because it is a county of opportunity when trying to do something. When you try to do something, you will get it. If you want to work or earn money or get an education you can do that. There is opportunity and there is no discrimination against

any ethnicity or race. So that's why. The attitude towards the people are totally different. Life quality is different.

Interviewer: Would you say there was a lot of discrimination in your home country?

Participant: No discrimination but I would say if you are rich you will receive a different type of care than if you are poor. But here it doesn't matter if you are rich or not rich you will receive the same care in US hospitals. In my home country if you were very beautiful clothing and you go somewhere people speak differently to you but if you were low quality clothing. They won't tell you to your face but some people may speak differently maybe it depends on your personality.

Interviewer: So appearance is really big in your home country?

Participant: Yes; in my home country all people try to look very fashionable, I mean not all but most people try to wear high heels to look more nice and professional.

Interviewer: So status is big in your home country and how people perceive you?

Participant: At that time it was a very big difference, but now it became a bit easier because they adopted something from the west and there is now there is a less judgment on your appearance.

Interviewer: I know you brought your child here to St. Louis with you correct?

Participant: Yes he is a 8 year old boy. He is great.

Interviewer: Is he in school right now?

Participant: Yes, he currently is in the 2nd grade at Francis Howell. When we first came to the US he was enrolled in KG within the public schools.

Interviewer: So before you came to the US. What did you know based on conversations or prior knowledge?

Participant: I knew things from the movies. I imagined high buildings and busy streets. Then I came to St. Louis and was little disappointed. On the movies it looks very beautiful but when I came it was problem with public transportation. Confusion and second I experienced a little of discomfort because in the streets there was not a lot of people. In New York and Chicago there are a lot of people in the street and even if you want to ask someone something there is no people to ask. This was like a disappoint.

Interviewer: Based on the movies, you envisioned busy streets and airplane landings? You talked about discomfort, were you kind of scared because you didn't see busy streets with people?

Participant: No, no I wasn't scared but when you see a lot of people its easier. In my home country the cities are very busy and it's a lot of people in the street and um all the neighbors in the neighborhood know each other but here. I wasn't scared but it just looked strange.

Interviewer: St. Louis is spread out and you have city county and there are certain areas where you see people and some areas you see no one at all.

Participant: In my home country there is a collective culture. Here it is a little different.

Interviewer: What is your sons name?

Participant: Eziz.

Interviewer: So how was the school enrollment process when you first came?

Participant: He was in Kindergarten, it wasn't difficult. I called the school and asked what documents did I need. I went to the school nearby where we lived and completed paperwork. The school was a couple of blocks over from where we lived.

Interviewer: Did you have to show proof of residence.

Participant: We were living with my husbands family so I just gave them that lease and a utility bill.

Interviewer: Did they offer any supports?

Participant: No not really because I didn't know there were any. I just wanted him to be in school and I did not feel comfortable with asking.

Interviewer: You had everything that was needed in terms of documentation?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: Who would you say was the most helpful as you were trying to enroll him?

Participant: The lady in the main office, maybe secretary and the school counselor

Interviewer: So did they provide you with any resources in the community?

Participant: No they gave me letter and school supplies needed for Kindergarten and a day to say hi to teacher. We went there and got all the school supplies.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything from the school that helped you at home?

Participant: What I need I learn myself. I either google it or find on YouTube.

Interviewer: So do you work here?

Participant: Yes I worked here for a Russian company. It is a logistics company. I worked there as a receptionist and as an assistant for a accountant. Many drivers speak Russian and I worked there for 4 years then after that I quit and worked for 4 months at daycare. Last year I had my second baby, she is one now and she was premi baby and that is why I quit my job and I am at home now.

Interviewer: So your husband he works?

Participant: He works in Logistics company as well.

Interviewer: Does he do the same thing you used to do?

Participant: No he is a manager.

Interviewer: So he had a good transition?

Participant: Yes and plus he was a truck driver when he came here. He started off as a truck driver and work really hard to get himself higher pay.

Interviewer: So how do you like being at home now?

Participant: Not really but I have no free time. In the future I don't want to have to stay at home because its boring.

Interviewer: So have you used any type of community resource?

Participant: When I came here the first year I attended a language learner classes at public school in Hazelwood. When I attended classes I found it easy for me. I just attended classes a few times and at that time I did not have drivers license and couldn't drive so after that I did not attend them anymore. I tried really hard to teach sel.

Interviewer: What made you move to St. Charles?

Participant: My husband think the school is better

Interviewer: Did your husband learn from other people about the school systems?

Participant: We lived in St. Louis City at first but the first year when I came here my husband had a incident. My husband was walking down the street and someone asked my husband to give up his wallet. Then he decided that we needed to move to safe place. We used to live by the International Institute.

Interviewer: Did you or your husband go there for classes?

Participant: Not me but my husband did when he first came. They came as refugees and lived in that area with family and received classes at International Institute.

Interviewer: What other services and resources within the community did you or your husband use besides the language learner classes and international institute? Did you all know of anything else from family that came before you?

Participant: Places to support your family with extra. Like food banks and children supplies but I never used the services. I heard that some families use those services. Food banks, supplies for babies.

Interviewer: You heard this from networks or other people?

Participant: From other people.

Interviewer: St. Louis has a lot of resources but a lot of people are not aware of them. This a major part of the study that is being explored.

Participant: My struggle about schooling. I did not attend school here so um. I tried to learn stuff from google or YouTube not from physical person. The second my struggle is about my education. How do I apply to stuff ? I have to call and get explanation of the process

Participant: In my home country its very different from here. Here you have to be very independent and there you get guidance and help. Even here you cant ask people anything but back home you can ask for help/support. People are not comfortable to ask anything here.

Interviewer: I know you said your primary kinships/network was your husband and his family. Was there anyone else that you can think of that helped you transition?

Participant: Some people from my home country that live here they came here as refugees as well. For like big holidays like new years we would visit and make party.

Interviewer: Did they ever tell you about things about the city or tell you about places that can help you?

Participant: Yes; they always gave me good suggestions. For example when I was pregnant they would say go to this hospital. They were very helpful.

Interviewer: Did they live in the city?

Participant: Yes they lived in the city. Near Delmar .

Interviewer: Did they live together with others?

Participant: No they were a couple with one child. They were from the same city that I am from.

Interviewer: Did you know them personally before you came?

Participant: No I met them here.

Interviewer: How did you get in contact with them or know who they were?

Participant: Because one of them worked with my husband. I got contact through my husband.

Interviewer: Was his wife really nice? They have children as well?

Participant: Yes, they have one child.

Interviewer: So when you compare the resources you received from the school....

Participant: Actually everything was understandable, so if I want a new resource I just go to the website. I used parent portal to check grades, that was interesting to learn

Interviewer: Has there ever been a time when you were here when things were a bit difficult or “tight”?

Participant: Cost is more here. I was a little tight because every system is different here. Even applying for taxes. It was very confusing at the beginning because in my home country we do not apply for taxes. Its kind of social security number and it automatically takes from your salary. I mean its different, you don't have to at end of year collect all your papers and apply for taxes.

Interviewer: So you don't have to do anything with taxes back home?

Participant: Yes and social services- everything is different. First time I felt less comfortable because I didn't have enough knowledge of all the systems. How it worked....

Interviewer: Are the systems back home more welcoming?

Participant: If you go to for example just tax office there and say OK I have to do this this what do I need to do? They will give you list of documents and say you have to do this this this and kind of help you. You have to source yourself and learn yourself. I felt more comfortable at my home country because from my childhood I knew everything, my parents did this and I was aware of everything.

Interviewer: What do you do when things get tight for you here?

Participant: First I try to search online and if I cant find out I try to call. I may look very annoying and I always say “I’m sorry for many questions.”

Interviewer: Are you comfortable with calling and asking questions?

Participant: Yes, sometimes.

Interviewer: So we have a lot of families whom utilities are often disconnected because they lack finances to pay. So we connect them with community resources that will pay for them. Where do you seek support?

Participant: About bills, it was new for me that someone can pay for you. I have never done that. For his family, I can ask for maybe grocery store- something easy because my sisters in law are not educated and they speak English worse than me so they ask help from me a lot. Sometimes I go as a interpreter for them at their schools.

Interviewer: Do they have children that are enrolled in school?

Participant: Yes. They always- all schools invite interpreters but sometimes if they don’t have and she needs help, I can help with filling out some paperwork. Their English worse than mine.

Interviewer: Sometimes you are able to go to the school with them? Are you familiar with where their children were enrolled?

Participant: Public School. Some were born here and some were not. They start one grade below. For example, if they were 7th grade in home country, they start 6th grade when they got here. One level down.

Interviewer: They have supports in their schools?

Participant: They have TSOL support, they always have interpreter supports for the parents and reduced lunches. They had everything that school provides, family used all benefits.

Interviewer: So when you think about your experiences, leaving your home country coming to St. Louis and starting a new life with your husband and children and some of the challenges you’ve experienced, how do you feel about your overall experience.

Participant: At the beginning it was adaptation and I didn’t know about a lot of things. Even paying for utility and so I learned everything now. I feel now comfortable. Sometimes I have some questions if I try to learn about something, I just google it and learn online. I don’t ask for help because sometimes I don’t want to look annoying, if you want to ask for help from someone. Sometimes I don’t want to look stupid. I like old people because they are more willing to help. If I want to learn something I learn myself,

through online sources and If I really need someone to hear it from I just type the phone number and call to ask.

Interviewer: The person you call is your family?

Participant: Not family; for example, if I ask question about social services I call directly to them because they will give me correct answers. But the good I speak little English and I am able to understand English but the families who don't speak English I think I feel bad for them. Probably experience a lot of struggle.

Interviewer: In terms of the housing market living here vs. living back home would you say easier or harder to find housing

Participant: It is not difficult here and it's not difficult there. If you have finances to pay then you are fine everywhere.

Interviewer: How much would you say you spend back home on housing?

Participant: If you want to purchase it, just apartment 2 bedroom it depends on the area. There are high cost areas and low cost areas average about between \$25,000- \$40,000 dollars to buy.

Interviewer: Can you rent back home?

Participant: Yes you can rent.

Interviewer: How much is rent?

Participant: Rent is about \$200 a month

Interviewer: \$200 US dollars? For high cost or low cost?

Participant: Middle cost, \$100 is lower cost with less appliances. I converted it from my currency to US

Interviewer: What's your currency back home?

Participant: SOM

Interviewer: So what is the equivalency rate? So \$1 is 8,000 SOM. \$100 is 800,000 SOM. Living expenses is not. Clothing is cheap but the food is not cheap. Housing is expensive.

Interviewer: Would you say housing is expensive because there is a income differential?

Participant: No they don't look at income.

Interviewer: Would you say based on what you get for finances from work would that cover your housing?

Participant: Yes; for example if you earn good money you can afford better housing, like here. If you earn less money so you can afford worse housing. So actually every salary is from \$100 to \$1000. \$1000 means its very good salary so \$100 is very low salary.

Interviewer: Would you say there were a lot more options with housing when you came here?

Participant: Yes I think so. If you need rent and salary is \$100 and its hard to cover everything. Two working people in the family one person who cover housing and the other person cover other expenses.

Interviewer: Its hard for one person to cover everything?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: What do you wish you would have known before you came?

Participant: I wish I would have known more about the education system in the United States and I wish to know about Social Services. What Social Services do they have and what can country provide to people that just came to the United States.

Interviewer: When you first came? Did you husband tell you what to do or did you have to research and figure it out yourself?

Participant: Actually most things I had to figure out myself because he was always busy and he came from work and it was extra for him to answer my questions. At that time when I came for searching for something online it was difficult for me but now I learned a lot of things. What was difficult for me then is now easy for me now.

Interviewer: Did you have to complete a lot of paperwork for refugee status?

Participant: No I came with Visa and after marriage I got documents due to my husband.

Interviewer: Did you look online to figure out how to complete documents and process?

Participant: Actually no we hired lawyer for my documents because I did not want to mess up immigration documents. I was new and didn't know anything and no. If you mess up they can decline your case.

Interviewer: How long was your Visa for?

Participant: It was for one year.

Interviewer: So you had that one-year to get everything figured out?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: Your husband came refugee status and completed all of the paperwork while he was here?

Participant: Actually yes he came as a refugee through the international institute and the lawyers made everything for him. He even didn't speak English at all and so Social Services always have refugees than independent people who came here with Visa. When people come as a refugee the government is responsible for people to prepare them.

Interviewer: You all met back home correct?

Participant: Yes; we met online. Many people do that now. After that we liked each other and met physically.

Interviewer: He then left and came to the United States and a few years later you were able to reconnect with him here?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: What are some things you would say that you were worried about by being here in St. Louis?

Participant: I'm worried about America. All people say America is a rich country but I worry because there are a lot of people in hunger because of low income of their families. I worry that many people who doesn't speak English don't have enough opportunities to get useful information that's available to them. Personally if I say about myself, I'm worried about being able to find job in the future because I am not native speaker and I have to do a lot of things to qualify for small job. I worry because my kids go to high grade. Elementary is pretty easy but when they go to middle school and high school there is a difference. I am worried that I may not be able to help them because I don't understand. Some procedures I don't know how to complete. 10th and 11th grade you have to pass SAT or ACT. My husbands niece told me. My home country it is different.

Interviewer: Do you have to take a test in your home country?

Participant: No you complete high school and after completing high school you apply to the University and you take test from the University. Its different. But if you pass your SAT you can apply to 2 universities but in my home country you can only apply to one university. You have to take physical test. You have to go there and sit there with many students and all teachers monitor and you cannot cheat or anything. You have to take

physical test and all universities have tests in one day and you cannot go and apply. If you fail here you cant go somewhere else. You have to wait another year to take test. They tell you to study more. All university tests they have on one day. If you fail here you don't have another day for test.

Interviewer: Would you say it's difficult for opportunities for education back home due to that?

Participant: Yes I think so but here you can apply for a few universities if you have good SAT score you can get scholarships.

Interviewer: I took the ACT in high school and I don't believe high school prepared me to take the exam. They gave me the basics.

Participant: Could you get tutor?

Interviewer: I grew up poor so it was not that easy to pay for tutor. I was also the first person in my family to go to college.

Participant: Does government help with tutors?

Interviewer: No; I have not heard of a resource. I had to take the test based off what I knew. A lot of my college scholarships were based on my academic performance in high school, being a minority and playing sports.

Participant: My concern in the future is all parents guide kids to go to university all have advantages and disadvantages. I don't know how occupations work there and hopefully I can give my children good suggestion.

Interviewer: So where do you see yourself and your family in 5-10 years?

Participant: -laughing- I don't know. Loving mom and son graduates for school. Hopefully I can have a good job to help support family. I will feel comfortable in my work place and in American life.

Interviewer: Does that discomfort come from you not being a native speaker?

Participant: Yes. Secondly I don't know all the rules of the systems and how they work. For example if you don't know you can ask your parents or aunts and I don't have anyone to ask here and its kind of struggle. Sometimes if I want to ask questions I feel shy. Do I look stupid if I ask easy question?

Interviewer: When you think about everything we talked about today; your transition here accessing services within the community and school, is there anything else that you think is important for me to understand your experience?

Participant: No I think we discussed everything. Sometimes I want to ask things that are unusual but I think it is normal to ask I mean is it not rude because of different culture. I don't want to hurt someone's feelings. I just want to get information without hurting someone and without being silly. Sometimes I think is it appropriate to ask this question? Is it a good time?

Interviewer: Thank you

Participant: I would suggest that parents of immigrant children to create a package of how to manage their bills. Guidance how to use social services, how to find interpreter, how to find doctors for the parents. I think it will be very helpful for when they first come. If they don't speak English, translate this package into their native language to help them understand everything. Give them list of services. Language services and others.

Interviewer: Do you think that would have helped you a lot more?

Participant: Yes; when I came here I did not know anything. I had to learn myself . I'm always happy to share if someone does not know anything because it is very difficult in a new culture to learn everything independently.

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