THE EFFECTS OF FAMILY SEPARATION ON FORCIBLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA

FINDINGS FROM A PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT

CONDUCTED BY THE AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS AND THE REFUGEE TRAUMA AND RECOVERY PROGRAM, UNSW SYDNEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While it is globally recognized that separation from family is a highly distressing situation, limited research has been conducted to understand the specific effects of family separation to inform practice and policy. This report summarizes the findings from a research project conducted to map the impact of family separation on forcibly displaced individuals (i.e people with a refugee background) resettled in Australia. The project was conducted by the Australian Red Cross in collaboration with the Refugee Trauma and Recovery Program (RTRP) at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Thirteen individuals participated in semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis was conducted. Four core domains of results emerged relating to how family separation affected participants: (1) **Beliefs** and values related to family unity vs. separation; (2) Direct **impact** of family separation; (3) **Action** taken to mitigate the impact of separation; (4) **Coping** and support mechanisms.

Domain 1: Beliefs and values related to family unity vs. separation. Participants reflected their belief in the importance of family in shaping identity and for practical support. Family unity was desired to enhance happiness, for security and to facilitate settlement in Australia.

Domain 2: Direct impact of family separation. The findings demonstrate the negative impact of family separation on psychological wellbeing – particularly by increasing worry, reducing daily functioning, shifting self-identity and disrupting family dynamics. Notably, the quality of the impact differed whether family was missing or separated. While connecting with missing family members was associated with strong positive emotion such as joy, there appeared to be a concomitant shift in the quality of distress from grief to more fear-based reactions, and a shift in an external to internal sense of control over events, often placing an enormous burden on participants. As such, participants felt a strong sense of responsibility for separated family members, including to provide financial, emotional and practical support, such as assistance for separated family to immigrate to Australia.

Domain 3: Action taken to reduce the impact of separation. Participants exhibited high levels of resourcefulness in finding missing family, connect with separated family and to work towards physical reunification. Key barriers to acting included a lack of information, language, and expense relating to mobile phone contact or poor access to more cost-effective means of communication. Key enablers included receiving the right support, for example from the Australian Red Cross, to facilitate linking with missing family and to provide support during this process. While communicating with separated family was critical to the wellbeing of participants, it was also associated with distress and feelings of powerlessness to change the situation.

Domain 4: Coping and support mechanisms. Despite facing a multitude of difficulties, many participants engaged in activity-based (eg., working), social (eg., social support), spiritual (eg., religious practice), and cognitive and emotion-based (eg., distraction, acceptance) coping strategies. Receiving positive support from professional services, family and community members was common. Participants displayed many markers of resilience, including maintaining hope for their future, taking concrete action, having some family in Australia and taking advantage of the opportunities in Australia.

The findings from this project demonstrate the broad impact of family separation on individuals affected by forcible displacement. It highlights the complexity of the needs of people facing long term separation, and the importance of understanding how these needs evolve over time through further research. Services such as the Restoring Family Links (RFL) program at the Australian Red Cross have an important role to play in not only connecting missing family members but to support refugees living with prolonged uncertainty connected with the different phases of family separation.

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The Australian Red Cross (ARC) implements the Restoring Family Links (RFL) program as a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the "Movement"[1]). The central principle of the RFL program is the right to know the fate of missing family members. This recognises the importance of the family unit as a fundamental group in society that underpins the wellbeing of individuals and communities. RFL aims to connect individuals with their missing or separated family members following forcible displacement, natural disaster, conflict or migration. RFL services also entail efforts to prevent separation, as well as support to maintain contact with family and with accessing reunification processes. Not knowing the location or fate of a loved family member is widely recognized as being extremely distressing[2]. In 2019, International Committee of the Red Cross, along with a number of national societies, published a report demonstrating that having missing or separated family is associated with significant hardship, and highlighted the importance of family unity[3]. Despite this, there has been very limited research conducted on the specific impacts of family separation and enduring uncertainty in relation to missing family.

The current project was motivated by the need to build knowledge on the impact of family separation on forcibly displaced individuals. The current study also emerged from initial findings from the Refugee Adjustment Study (RAS) – a longitudinal investigation of refugee settlement and wellbeing in Australia. The RAS is a collaborative research project between the ARC, Settlement Services International (SSI) and the Refugee Trauma and Recovery Program (RTRP) at UNSW Sydney (funded by the Australian Research Council). Initial findings from the RAS show that family separation is associated with elevated mental health symptoms – including posttraumatic stress and depression[4]. But why? What is it about the experience of separation that is so damaging for forcibly displaced individuals, and how do people respond to and cope with separation? Answering these questions may assist ARC, and the broader Family Links network of the Movement[5], to better understand the needs of those accessing RFL services, and inform practice models to support separated displaced individuals, including refugees and asylum seekers. In 2019, ARC and RTRP embarked on a qualitative research project as a first step towards examining the impact and experiences of family separation on refugees and asylum seekers residing in Australia. This report summarizes the findings from this study.

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[1] The Red Cross Movement is comprised of 192 National Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and International Federation of the Red Cross. International humanitarian law, which applies in situations of armed conflict, contains relevant rules concerning respect for family life, maintaining or re-establishing family links and clarifying the fate and whereabouts of persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict. These obligations stem from the Geneva Conventions of 1949 – and developed in Additional Protocol I of 1977 – to facilitate enquiries made by relatives of persons dispersed in connection with an armed conflict, with the aim of restoring family links and facilitating the reunion of dispersed families in every possible way.

[2] Example studies include: Miller A, Hess JM, Bybee D, et al. (2018) Understanding the mental health consequences of family separation for refugees: Implications for policy and practice. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 88: 26-37; Refugee Council, United Kingdom and Oxfam. (2018) Safe but Not Settled: The impact of family separation on refugees in the UK; Savic M, Chur-Hansen A, Mahmood MA, Moore V (2013). Separation from family and its impact on the mental health of Sudanese refugees in Australia: a qualitative study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 37, 383-388.

[3] British Red Cross, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Red Cross EU Office, Swedish Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross. 2019. Humanitarian Consequences of Family Separation and People Going Missing.

[4] Liddell BJ, Byrow Y, O'Donnell M, Mau V, Batch N, McMahon T, Bryant RA, Nickerson A. Mechanisms Underlying the Mental Health Impact of Family Separation on Resettled Refugees. Manuscript currently under review.

[5] The Family Links Network comprises National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and ICRC delegations, coordinated by the Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC.

METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited from the ARC client database, including past and current clients who had either (a) previously experienced family separation; or (b) were currently experiencing family separation, following forcible displacement. A total of 37 individuals were initially contacted, with a final group of 14 participants being interviewed. One participant was subsequently excluded as they did not have direct experience of family separation as a consequence of forcible displacement. There were 13 participants included in the final analysis.

Qualitative interviews were led by ARC RFL Field Officers, with the majority being conducted face-to-face in a Red Cross office (2 interviews were conducted on the phone). Interpreters were used if required (N = 8). Prior to interview, participants provided informed consent according to ethics approval by the UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee (HC190214). Interviews followed a semi-structured format, with questions being developed by the UNSW and ARC research team based on institutional knowledge and the existing evidence-base (see Appendix). Interviews took between 30-90 minutes, and were recorded with participant's permission. Participants were provided with a shopping voucher to reimburse them for expenses associated with taking part in the study. Interviews were conducted between July-October 2019.

Interviews were transcribed by an ARC volunteer or a member of the RTRP UNSW team between August-November 2019. Following de-identification, data was coded by a researcher from UNSW and an RFL officer from ARC – who jointly established a coding framework. This framework was subsequently implemented by a 3rd independent coder (at UNSW). Coding was largely consistent between the 3 coders, and coded data was merged for thematic analysis following established qualitative study guidelines. Data analysis occurred in December 2019-March 2020.

PARTICIPANTS

A table summarizing the characteristics of the participants can be found in the Appendix. In brief, the majority of participants were female (61.5%), with a country-of-origin from the African continent (69.2%)[6], were currently separated from their parents or siblings (69.2%) and had some family in Australia (61.5%). All participants were currently experiencing family separation, with separated family living in high-risk contexts, e.g. regions experiencing conflict or refugee camps. The majority of participants had previously had family members missing, with contact restored through the assistance of the ARC RFL program (N = 7; 53.8%), a small number had both missing and separated family members (N = 4; 30.8%), 1 participant was separated from all their family, and 1 participant had all their family missing at the time of interview.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis led to the identification of four domains relating to the experience of family separation (Figure 1). Each theme comprised a number of constituent themes and sub-themes. In this report, the most prominent themes are presented and discussed, along with illustrative quotes from participants.

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[6] Because of the small sample size, country, city, or village information were de-identified for data analysis and presentation.
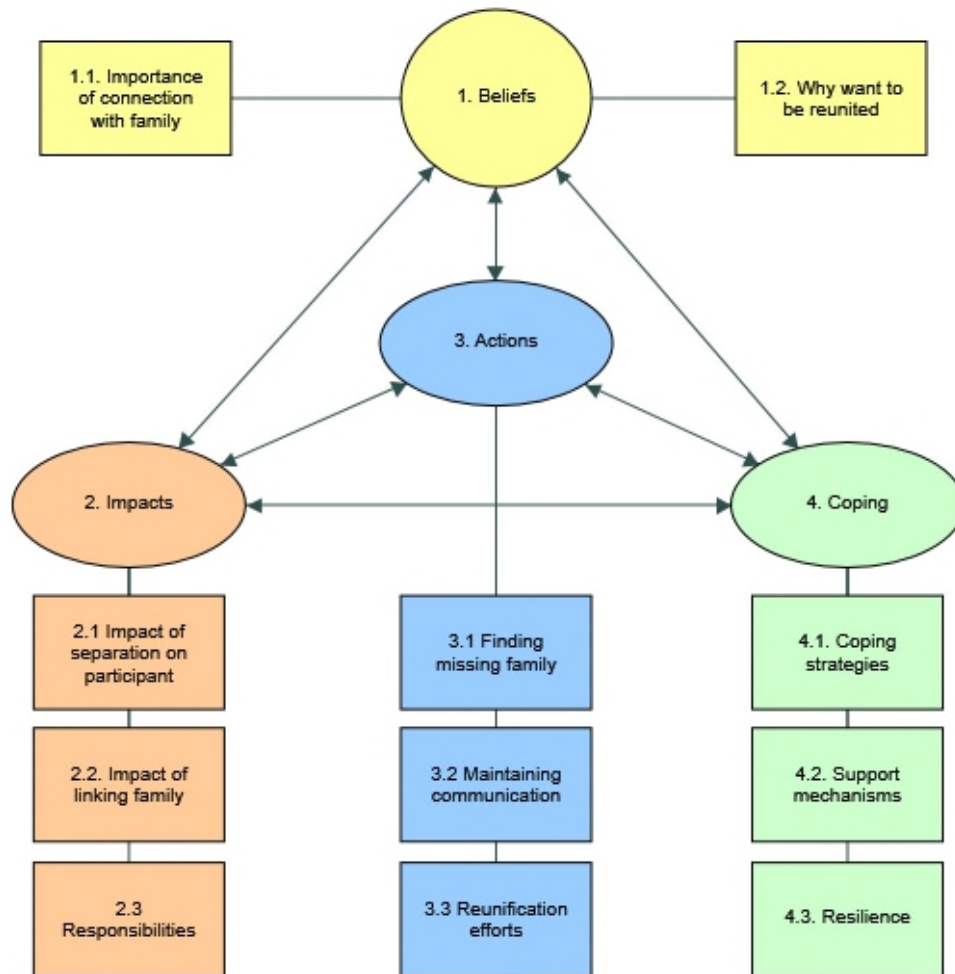
Figure 1: Concept map depicting four domains and key themes relating to the experience of family separation that emerged from the study.

Domain 1: Beliefs regarding family separation and unity

Participants were asked why they believed it was important for families to be united in order to gauge their beliefs regarding family separation and unification (noting 1 participant was not asked this question). Responses fell into 2 key themes.

Theme 1.1: Importance of connection with family

Sub-theme 1.1.1: Gives meaning to life

All participants agreed that family connection was a vital component of human life. One emergent theme was that connection to family gave life meaning, and was fundamental to self-identity and the human condition. For example:

> *"Because this is the nature of life. A parent, a Mum and a Dad of the children, they have to live together. They have to be together. Because if you live without them it's not life. What kind of life is this? We all have to live together as a family." (Participant 21)*

Sub-theme 1.1.2: Supportive role of family
A second theme that was widely endorsed was the practical and emotional support that family connection brings. Family helps navigate challenging life events protects against the negative impact of stress, enabling individuals to thrive and participate in the broader community.

> *"Being together, or having constant contact with your family member is important because you share the problem, you solve the problem together, and you help one another, emotionally, economically, and being together helps to build a future life together with family members, that's why it's important."* (Participant 38)

> *"There are a lot of things that can have as serious impact on our lives when we don't have our relatives together with us."* (Participant 32)

> *"(Family unity is important to me)…to live (a) happy life. Not sad life, stressful life. To be (a) happy life. Everyone will (be) happy. It is good for me. (I) can experience helping other people. (Participant 28)"*

Theme 1.2: Reasons why want to be reunited with family

All participants were currently experiencing some form of family separation at the time of interview, and thus, all wished to be reunited with separated family. The reasons why fell into 3 key themes:

Sub-theme 1.2.1: For the purposes of peace and happiness

> *"I'm thinking back about how the time I passed with them, how I be with them. And if I see them and be with them now it makes me so happy to be with them."* (Participant 37)

Sub-theme 1.2.2: For the purposes of security and support

> *"If I had my family members around, my uncle, it could have made everything easier. Even here in Australia, I could have had him, I could have continued with my higher education because he would be there, maybe look for work, support me, and I could have even gone (studying) because I believe I was smart enough. But because I had no support, no relatives, no nothing whatsoever, I had to take care of myself, stop studying and go for work. Pay bills, put food on the table. Having relatives, definitely you cannot compare it with any other things."* (Participant 32)

> *"There are so many problems, we are just two [me and my husband]. If my siblings were here, they could probably help me look after my children."* (Participant 10)

Sub-theme 1.2.3: For the purposes of living and settling in Australia as a family

> *"But if we bring our families here, for all of us it would be better you know, better even (for) Australia (to) see our culture."* (Participant 4)

Summary and discussion of findings under Domain 1: Beliefs

Unpacking beliefs associated with family separation shines a spotlight on the importance of adopting a person-centred approach when working with vulnerable individuals facing long-term family separation or supporting people while searching for their missing family members. Clearly, it is a fundamental need for people to be connected, ideally physically, with supportive family. The observations from this study highlight the importance of programs like the RFL program to assist people with one of the many important steps in the process of connecting with their missing family members.

The engagement with families by Red Cross through the longstanding RFL program also offers insights into the experience of family separation. Family relationships are central as key support mechanisms and the roles within family structures underpin identity. The distress frequently witnessed by Red Cross appears to be an outward reflection of the disruption to these primary relationships at a time when family support and unity is sorely needed as people grapple with their identity after resettlement following forced displacement.

Domain 2: Impact of being separated from family

Given the key focus of the study was to examine the impact of family separation on individuals, this theme was the most prevalent and comprised three major themes, each with a number of sub-themes.

Theme 2.1: Direct impact of family separation on the participant.

Sub-theme 2.1.1: Impact of family separation on psychological well-being

The most prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the psychological impact of being separated from family. Responses related either to (a) the mental health burden or (b) emotional toll of family separation.

(a) **Mental health burden of separation**: The most prevalent category in terms of mental health impact was worry, endorsed by 100% of participants. Worries were particularly fear-based, with participants being concerned about the wellbeing of separated family members, particularly their security (physical, financial or health), or the fate of their missing family members.

> *"Because they are separate(d) from me, they are not safe, I am always thinking in my mind that they get kidnapped, because they do, they get kidnapped a lot of people, and they take their kidneys, they kill them, so I am always, I can't get, what do they call it, I can't compare it, it is like hundreds and hundreds of worries." (Participant 28)*

Participants were also highly worried about the future, with the uncertainty relating to their family being reflected in a sense of foreshortened future.

> *"I'm partly safer here, but inside - I'm not safe inside. The reason because my future, I'm always afraid for the future of my family." (Participant 4)*

The pre-occupation with separated family significantly interfered with the psychological wellbeing and general functioning of a number of participants – including capacity to concentrate, sleep, study or work (see Sub-theme 2.1.2).

> *"Basically, this particular situation of separation – there is no other thing or vision or idea that comes to your mind. You just think about your family, what is happening to your family, how is their wellbeing, what's going on with them, what's happening to them. You never think about making friends, working, doing this or doing that – no. You are just focused on thinking about what's happening to my family. That's it every day, every minute." (Participant 10)*

Participants also endorsed experiencing anxiety and stress, depression and a degree of helplessness connected with their separation. Some participants also observed mental health issues in their family members, including children.

> *"It has affected mentally for me because I got depression, very severe depression, I got very ill, I got so unwell and especially my young son and my other children, we were all with mental health problems like depression." (Participant 21)*

Across the interviews, participants also mentioned other mental health related concerns, including appetite problems, sleep disturbances, and physical health issues. One participant also recounted experiencing more serious mental health symptoms such as dissociation (i.e. experiencing extreme disconnection from thoughts or physical places), which can be a symptom of significant stress or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)[7].

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[7] Schauer M, Elbert T (2010). Dissociation following Traumatic Stress: Etiology and Treatment. *Journal of Psychology*, 218(2), 109-127.

> *"So my situation is, yesterday I talked with one of my friends, I said I'm no good you know in terms of mentally, too much pressure, so sometimes, I forget everything, even myself. Sometimes I put some stuff in room I don't remember where I put it." (Participant 4)*

(b) Emotional toll of separation: All participants expressed experiencing negative emotional responses to their situation of being separated from family. Participants described their situation as being "hard", "difficult" or "challenging", causing "suffering" or "hurt" and experiencing "pressure" about the situation, including pressure to act in an uncontrollable situation. Prominent emotions included sadness and fear, which were both tightly interwoven with worry about separated family members, and the absence of family to support participants in their daily lives. Other less prevalent negative emotions mentioned by some participants included anger/frustration and guilt/shame. It's important to note that while 8 of the 13 participants reported significant sadness, not all were functionally impaired because of this.

> *"Yes, separation is very hard, it's very hard to be separated from your family. You never know whether they are alive or dead, even they have been impacted mentally and spiritually." (Participant 10)*

> *"Will I be alive today or tomorrow? They live day by day. Not month by month or week by week like living here. Next year program. 10 years program. They don't have program for (the) next minute. They will be alive or get kidnapped or they will kill them. It is not safe. Dangerous place to live. So that make(s) me upset, (that) the process of the [legal service] take so long." (Participant 28)*

Participants also reported experiencing positive emotions relating to locating missing family members, and hope that their situation will improve in the future. Critically, many participants reported experiencing conflicting emotions about trying to continue with their lives in Australia while being deeply worried about their family.

> *"Because I have more worry inside. Maybe outside I have clothes. I have good clothes. But inside I feel really bad. I feel really sad. It is very difficult. Very hard to explain." (Participant 28)*

Sub-theme 2.1.2: Impact of family separation on functioning and increased daily stressors
A salient theme was the impact of separation on the participant's (a) day-to-day and (b) social functioning. Family separation strongly interfered with daily functioning for a number of participants and their families, including working, going to school or studying. This impact appears to be tied to the emotional burden of the separation, where participants reported impaired concentration, sleep or goal-directed activity because of worries connected with separated family.

> *"In that time. I didn't even go to school or work because I was feeling very sad." (Participant 9)*

> *"When she was missing I was thinking like, I just missed out everything, not doing study, not looking for job, not going outside meeting other people. I was just staying at home, frustrated" (Participant 28)*

Participants also reported experiencing significant logistical challenges because of being separated from family. Principally, pressure to financially support themselves and their families, as well as the costs associated with maintaining communication with separated family, was highly prevalent. For some, this affected their capacity to realise their own personal goals such as studying or engaging socially.

> *"The only thing is whenever I have money I (am) willing to support them and send money, so I don't have any spare money except whatever money I have I always support them and send it." (Participant 30)*

Social functioning impairments appeared to be linked to the loss of social support as a result of family separation. The absence of important family members to assist in co-regulating distress or to provide moral support to facilitate social opportunities, negatively affected some participant's and their adjustment to life in Australia.

> *"In that time, when I was thinking about my family, I didn't think to make friends or to say hello to people or interact with other people. I wasn't even smiling or laughing. When I met someone, and they said hello to me, it was just "hello, hello". To say it or to socialize, it was impossible." (Participant 10)*

> *"Being together would (have) been a huge advantage, comforting each other. For him, since he is a grown man, I would feel more secure with him around, and so, there are a lot of things I miss being separated like this. There are a lot of things I could benefit from if we were together. (Participant 32)"*

Participants also outlined the difficulties of not having practical support from family, which interfered with daily functioning. For example, not having the support of extended family for child care to enable participants to work or study.

> *"There are so many problems, we are just two [me and my husband]. If my siblings were here, they could probably help me look after my children, we could have shifts; some go to work and some look after children. I can't work full time or can't work the hours I want because I don't have anywhere I can put my children. Sometimes when my husband is sick, he doesn't go to work, and no one can look after the children. It's so hard for us to manage life." (Participant 10)*

Sub-theme 2.1.3: Impact of family separation on identity

Family separation appears to have a significant effect on identity. The most prominent themes that emerged from the interviews suggest that being separated from family results in a change in self-identity via shifts in sense of place in the world and diminishing perceptions of a hopeful future. This may be particularly salient for individuals who hold a self-identity that is more collectivistic – which puts the emphasis on the self in relation to others (i.e. "we"), and is common in non-Western cultural communities[8].

> *"This changes your personality, it changes everything, you don't think of anything else at the time." (Participant 10).*

> *"It had affected me for whole my life. Not just about studying or getting work or communicating. All of my life was affect(ed). Not thinking about (the) future. Just thinking about short things." (Participant 28)*

> *"I could not live my own life, I could not get married and settle or I can't go to school and do some courses and I'm really tied up with the daily life, which is routine jobs that's giving me a lot of stress." (Participant 30).*

Over half of the participants also described how family separation had affected their ability to engage in cultural or religious practices. Most potent was a sense of cultural loss because of family separation, which amplified feelings of social isolation, impacting on adaptive settlement in Australia. Losing the cultural anchor of family appears to be related to feeling more unsettled and less connected with the Australian community. The strength of this impact was also linked to beliefs around the role of family unity for the preservation of

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[8] Liddell BJ, Byrow Y, O'Donnell M, Mau V, Batch N, McMahon T, Bryant RA, Nickerson A. Mechanisms Underlying the Mental Health Impact of Family Separation on Resettled Refugees. Manuscript currently under review. Miller A, Hess JM, Bybee D, et al. (2018) Understanding the mental health consequences of family separation for refugees: Implications for policy and practice. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 88: 26-37; Savic M, Chur-Hansen A, Mahmood MA, Moore V (2013). Separation from family and its impact on the mental health of Sudanese refugees in Australia: a qualitative study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 37, 383-388.

culture (see Domain 1). Notably maintaining religious practices despite these difficulties emerged as a vital coping mechanism for some participants.

> *"I need to share with other people how my culture is good. How it helps. That's why I feel like I am losing my religion here. Back home if someone has a problem then everyone is involved to help this person and encourage this person, and helping him instead of this person going the bad way. So here also like I saw like some… I need to share my culture with other people and use my language to communicate with other people. It affect me on my brain, I can't express my feelings or my culture with other people because I am always worrying and thinking about my family. (I) want to share my culture or my religion. I am a religious person so I just pray to god. That is also helping me." (Participant 28)*

Sub-theme 2.1.4: Impact of family separation on family dynamics

Separation from family seems to strongly affect family dynamics. For instance, many participants related the impact of the separation on other family members, especially children, who also experience mental health symptoms such as stress or low mood (depression). In other examples, participants recounted that their children appear distracted with their life in Australia such as going to school, which was helpful to them in terms of coping. In one instance, the uncertainty connected to ongoing family separation appeared to erode the trust children had in their parents, which deeply concerned the participant.

> *"In February. When I want to come back here, my son you know he put all his clothes into my bag. He took his passport and I tried to tell him. Your papers are different because I have travel documents. But his mother, my wife, says you look after us because you the man. So I told him when I come here I will do the papers for him to come here. And after that he said "ok". He telling me I'm a liar. You know they grow up and they remember that." (Participant 4)*

Participants also described the shared despair, sadness and fear experienced by their separated family members.

> *"He's crying from there, my children are crying from here, I'm just looking at these things and it's very hard for me, they're crying from here and he's crying over the phone. It's very hard." (Participant 21)*

Critically, separation from family also shifted roles in the family, resulting in taking on additional responsibilities in the family.

> *"I am the elder of all. Just everything was just, the responsibility of all was always on me when I was there, because my father was disappeared. And the others are younger than me. Because of this, I feel great responsibility about them." (Participant 36)*

Several participants also mentioned that they were impacted because they lost connection with their extended family and communities, and were concerned that their children in Australia did not have relationships with extended family (e.g. grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins). This was also reflected in regret in the loss of the family unit, and the consequential effects of losing the capacity to work together or celebrate happy events together.

Theme 2.2: Impact of linking with family on the participant

Twelve of the 13 participants had previously experienced or currently had a family member who was missing, and consequently, many reflected on the impact of restoring links with a missing family member. Participants highlighted the positivity of connecting with a missing family member where positive emotional states including happiness and hope were common, alongside a sense of restoration and new life.

> *"Every night, every day we were worrying and we were crying and we were praying and God knows what happened to him, where did he go, you know like – it was very strange for us as well. But you know like finding him through Red Cross is like a miracle for us. It's like God has given him a second life." (Participant 21)*

"I think it's like getting out of the darkness and to the bright." (Participant 38).

Participants also remarked on the considerable improvement in their situation.

"I am okay since I am starting to contact with her." (Participant 36)

A particularly interesting pattern that emerged from the data was the shift in emotional states when a family member was located, but remained separated from the participant. When a family member was missing, it was common to experience a desperate yearning for information about the family member, and to perceive an external locus of control (i.e. low levels of personal responsibility).

"Sometimes you don't know what is happening to a family [member], don't know where they are, things like that. You never know whether they are alive or dead." (Participant 10)

In some cases, this anguish was linked to feelings of helplessness and functional difficulties including problems undertaking everyday activities. Restoring family links was associated with gaining emotional stability in many respects, including relief and reassurance concerning the family member's wellbeing, and the subsiding of ambiguous grief and loss reactions.

When a missing family member was located, but continued to be separated from participants, participants reported experiencing positive emotions, but also an increase in a sense of personal responsibility and agency (i.e. a shift towards an internal locus of control). While this restored a sense of purpose to some participants, including engaging in work or study, another common consequence was an increase in stress relating to the safety and wellbeing of the separated family member because of the known risks they faced. Contradictory emotions were also reported – where happiness and a sense of relief existed alongside distress related to increased responsibility and sadness connected to ongoing physical separation.

"When she was missing I am just thinking I could not find her anymore, but now, as I said, sometimes I wake up at 12, night time, give them a call to check that they are alive so that make me bit happy but doesn't continue always make me happy always okay she will go missing again I will lose her again you know? I don't have any guarantee she is safe now. She is in [capital city in North Africa] but she is not safe. If you miss someone, (it) feel(s) like she's dead. She is alive now. She not safe. Which means if I miss her again she will be dead. It is very difficult." (Participant 28)

Theme 2.3: Responsibilities

Participants unanimously reported feeling responsible for their separated family members, in 3 clear sub-themes. Irrespective of the type of responsibility felt, it was strongly associated with elevated stress.

Sub-theme 2.3.1: Financial responsibility

The majority of participants financially supported their family overseas (N = 9; 69%), in the form of remittances ranging from partial to full support. This responsibility financially stretched participants, utilizing any of their spare income or necessitated them working multiple jobs to support the needs of their family. A small number (N = 2) expressed a desire to assist family but were not in the financial position to do so.

"Money. I am responsible for money. If I don't send them money then they can't survive. Emotionally if I don't give her hope. She can't survive. So everything I have responsibility for my family. So I give her a call. Send her money. Sometimes if I have $100 I will send her $50 and leave $50 for her to survive. Because also if I am sick, if I die here, instead of this I am just trying to help them." (Participant 28)

Sub-theme 2.3.2: Emotional support

Just as common was the responsibility to emotionally support and protect separated family members (N = 9; 69%). Participants viewed their role as being a source of hope and strength for their separated family, which was often coupled with a sense of powerlessness to provide concrete support. This emotional support was often bidirectional, with separated family doing their best to support the wellbeing of participants.

"I tell her to forget about it, advise her, all the problems are in the past, and it will be history, so just pray to God and then whenever you need to talk to me, just flash me (on the phone), and I'll call you back." (Participant 38)

Sub-theme 2.3.3: Responsibility to arrange the immigration of family members to Australia

Participants also expressed a strong desire to arrange to bring separated family to Australia, but were experiencing significant barriers in doing so. In some cases, family were exerting extra pressure on participants to facilitate this.

"Sometimes I give them a call at night time to check out they're alive and they're safe but I cannot change I do not have the power to change and bring them immediately to me but I am just waiting. (Participant 28)

"They were just calling me to like hurry up…. I told them it's not up to me, it's up to the Government." (Participant 16)

Summary and discussion of findings under Domain 2: Impacts

It is evident that family separation has a profound effect on the participants in this study. The psychological impact was predominantly stress and worry-related, which negatively affected daily functioning. The nature of the impact appeared to differ according to whether family members were missing or separated. Restoration of contact with a missing family member appeared to shift psychological reactions from grief to anxiety-based distress and the burden towards participants. Participants also felt a strong sense of responsibility to support their separated family.

The elements reflected in the findings mirror the experiences Red Cross has witnessed across a larger caseload over time. The complexity of responses observed frequently appears to link to which phase of the separation process a person is experiencing; whether the separation has been short or long term; whether multiple family members are missing; if there is hope for finding the missing family members alive; and the severity of traumatic events experienced before and during their migration experience. Understanding the relationships between these factors and how they impact on the individual experiencing family separation needs to be subject of future research.

Assessing the risks posed by an RFL search to missing family members is an important element that is considered in each case, and which also impacts on the how family separation is felt. The fear of unintended consequences frequently adds to the sense of responsibility family members experience when they seek assistance from Red Cross, as there is often a very real dilemma about whether it is indeed safe to even try to locate their family members through the RFL program.

Domain 3: Actions taken to assist finding, connecting or reuniting with family

A common topic focused on the set of actions that participants engaged in to either find missing family members, maintain contact with separated family members or to physically reunite with family. In each area, participant's responses could be grouped into either barriers – which included issues and problems affecting the capacity of participants to act; or helpful factors – which facilitated actions taken or achieved positive outcomes.

Theme 3.1: Actions taken to find missing family

Sub-theme 3.1.1: Barriers to finding family

Participants encountered substantial barriers when searching for missing family. These included a lack of information about the family member – including no formal records, no address or contact information. A breakdown in communication between family as a result of conflict or displacement was also common. Also

reported were logistical problems with conducting the search, including the remoteness of search areas, language barriers, reliance on interpersonal connections and being unaware of support programs such as the Red Cross RFL program.

> *"There's not much record of things. They don't even have birth certificates. They don't have anything like that. Like, they don't know things. They just know the day, like today's Monday, just the year, like there's not much, like that." (Participant 16)*

> *"I couldn't find anybody who could help me to contact until I found you guys (i.e. Red Cross)." (Participant 38)*

Sub-theme 3.1.2: Helpful factors in finding family

The most frequently cited factor that helped participants find their family was the Red Cross (N = 8; 62%). This can be attributed to the fact that participants were past or present Red Cross clients. In these cases, the RFL program assisted participants to find their missing family and to connect them.

> *"I came to Red Cross to help me to find my mum and then I met you [Red Cross field officer] and we had a great chat to help me to find my mum. It was good." (Participant 28)*

Participants expressed gratitude to the Red Cross for their assistance in finding missing family.

> *"Because of you guys, not only that you found him – but you connected me and him to be able to talk. At least, talking to someone is like seeing him. So I believe that what you guys do is amazing, is – how can I say this – is not comparable to anything else." (Participant 32)*

Additionally, having contacts in the local community proved to be helpful for participants, and one participant was able to locate their family via UNHCR mechanisms.

Theme 3.2: Actions taken to communicate with separated family

All participants were in regular contact with their separated family via the regular telephone as the most frequent mode of communication. Frequency of contact ranged from daily through to once a fortnight.

Sub-theme 3.2.1: Barriers to maintaining contact with family

Participants reported a number of significant barriers to communicating with family, which were either resource or situational based. Most prominent was the expense of mobile phone contact. Financially supporting this was a significant stressor for most participants. Also difficult was not receiving responses from separated family due to costs, poor phone line quality, time differences, the lack of postal system or permanent address. Surprisingly, few participants used internet-based providers for communicating with family – 3 participants mentioned using or trying to use either FaceBook, WhatsApp or Skype. These barriers were significant enough to prevent participants from being in contact with their family as often as they would have liked.

> *"It is expensive. Sometimes when my mind is getting more stressed I have to give her a call. It is not a specific time. Sometimes two weeks. Sometimes one week. Sometimes two times in a week. It depends when I got money also. If I got money I will give her a call. Otherwise I have to wait." (Participant 28)*

It's also important to recognize that contact with family was vitally important to participants, but at the same time, often caused them significant distress because of the ongoing separation and concern regarding the safety of family members.

> *"Sometimes it's distressing, sometimes it's happiness, because we talk about the past and the flashbacks, and so forth, but at the end, I tell her that you just pray to God and forget all bad memories of the past, so sometimes it's stressful, and sometimes it ends with happiness." (Participant 38)*

Sub-theme 3.2.2: Helpful factors for maintaining contact with family
A helpful factor in maintaining contact was having the financial resources to support contact, including even sending money to a separated family member to buy a mobile phone. In one case, having a support person to assist, even with interpreting, proved helpful.

Theme 3.3: Actions taken to physically reunite with separated family

The majority of participants felt responsible for facilitating the physical reunification with their separated family members, principally via immigration pathways to Australia. Notably, a small number of participants travelled internationally to visit separated family.

Sub-theme 3.3.1: Barriers to physically reuniting with family
The barriers to reunification include visa-related restrictions, with current visas preventing participants from either travelling to see family or accessing Australian Government family reunification programs.

> *"Since my son found out that his father is alive and they found him, he is in a mode of happiness and also he is very restless, like he is doing not very well. He just wanna go to [Middle Eastern-country of origin] to see his dad. He got his passport and he's really trying to go. … people who have permanent protection visa they can't go to [Middle Eastern-country of origin] but my son as soon as he found out he's very restless he wants to go." (Participant 21)*

A number of participants had commenced the formal application process to bring family to Australia, but significant barriers included expense, processing times and ongoing uncertainty. Another psychological barrier was the assumption that once a missing family member was found, physically reuniting would be a straight-forward process. But some found that reality contradicted this notion:

> *"To tell the story is easy.. your mum was missing and now we found her like that – but real life is very difficult. Your mum was missing and still separate from me. What is the guarantee she is safe? No guarantee. She could go missing again." (Participant 28)*

Other barriers included separated family being unable to access UNHCR formal refugee registration processes, or being unable to take time off work to visit family.

Sub-theme 3.3.2: Helpful factors for supporting physical reunification with family
Helpful factors to assist participants in their efforts to reunite with their separated family members included having NGO assistance, such as from legal services to facilitate immigration applications or the Red Cross to provide appropriate referrals to those services.

Summary and discussion of findings under Domain 3: Actions

Participants were highly active in the process to find missing family, with the majority having initiated searches through the Red Cross RFL program. Participants were also in regular communication with separated family members, which was associated with receiving comfort and reassurance, but also a significant amount of distress and powerlessness.

These findings reflect the wider experience that Red Cross has with clients of the RFL program, in that clients make every effort to search for missing family members and remain connected with separated family members. For some families, RFL is contacted at the beginning of the search process very soon after a family member has gone missing, for others, it is a last resort after years, when all other searches have been exhausted. It is common that families are continuing their own searches alongside the active tracing case with Red Cross. These searches can include reaching out to family and community contacts, searching social media, keeping up with various news and reports of current conflicts, or even flying over to the country they believe the missing person to be in. Families are incredibly resourceful and will sometimes locate the missing person

before Red Cross has any news. However, for some family members, information on their missing relative is scarce, and Red Cross remains one of the only avenues of hope for getting information on them. Other reasons a client may not access their own networks to search or connect with their separated family could be loss of connections due to conflict separating communities, the subsequent trauma or mental health impacts of migration, the stressors of settlement in a third country, or the lack of finances or resources to be able to search or maintain contact. All these factors highlight the importance of clients and Red Cross working together with a variety of informal and formal community networks to support families in their efforts to locate, communicate and reunify with their relatives.

Domain 4: Coping with family separation

The final domain relates to how participants coped with family separation, where 3 key themes emerged: coping strategies, support mechanisms and resilience factors.

Theme 4.1: Coping strategies

Participants engaged in a variety of active coping strategies with varying degree of success in terms of alleviating distress. These coping strategies are grouped into 5 key sub-themes.

Sub-theme 4.1.1: Activity-based coping strategies

Many participants used activity-based strategies to distract themselves from the burden of family separation. Predominantly, this included employment or study which was recognized for its positive influence and capacity to assist participants in keeping busy. Employment was also an important way by which participants felt they could support their separated family members.

> *"I have some people just to work with me, and it was very good thing for me just to forget everything and just focus on my job." (Participant 37)*

Some participants also engaged in implicit coping strategies by volunteering in the community, or assisting other members of the community.

> *"I do study full time and when I don't have uni, I am more involved in community and I do volunteer, at uni as well." (Participant 5)*

Sub-theme 4.1.2: Social-based coping strategies

Many participants also described that engaging in social-based coping strategies was beneficial to them, including serving as a distraction tool away from their worries, and receiving positive social support from others. Some participants also felt supported through communicating with their separated family members.

> *"I was going to visit one of my friends here, and I'd feel relieved. I'd forget at the time that I visited my friends, but upon leaving, I'd remember again." (Participant 10)*

However, another theme that also emerged was that family separation itself interferes with the natural instinct to seek social support in order to cope with stress.

> *"The refugees are just, since they flee their country and come to another second or third country, they don't have any chance or option to cope with others, it is very important to cope (with) each other, very important to support each other and come together for supporting each other. We were together as a family, still we feel just as the same family when we are together." (Participant 36)*

Sub-theme 4.1.3: Spiritual-based coping strategies

Another theme that emerged for 6 participants (46%) was their reliance on religious beliefs and spiritual practices to assist them in coping and reflecting on their situation.

"I depended on God. I pray for God, and so I kept on praying, that is how I managed to cope with the situation." (Participant 38)

Sub-theme 4.1.4: Cognitive and emotion-based coping strategies

Participants were clearly dealing with very strong negative emotions in connection with their family separation, including distress and sadness, as outlined under Domain 2. In order to manage these strong emotions, another coping-related theme that emerged was engaging in cognitive and emotion-focused strategies. Some of these strategies proved more helpful in alleviating distress than others. For instance, distraction appeared to be widely utilized to manage complex emotional reactions to difficult circumstances – including working overtime, taking care of family in Australia or engaging socially. Another tool used was acceptance – the understanding that since there are limits to what the participant can do to change the situation, they chose to accept it.

"I am doing a process to be reunited with my mum. I will take a process with immigration. It is very hard but sometimes if you don't have choice you have to be accepting and I am still waiting." (Participant 28)

One participant explicitly mentioned practicing a form of mindfulness, in recognition that they were experiencing extreme stress. They suggest that focusing on a singular task was helpful to them – in this case, answering the questions in the semi-structured interview of the current study.

"Sometimes I escape from my problems. Try to not feel that you. For example when you're asking me the question I'm, all my problems. I focus on your questions in order to answer." (Participant 4)

Conversely, it's important to recognize that some of these strategies are not always helpful in the long-term. Importantly, ruminating about separated family members – another cognitive-based coping strategy that was commonly used - is likely to be associated with adverse mental health outcomes (see Theme 2.1), although the evidence for this was unclear in the current study.

Sub-theme 4.1.5: Maladaptive coping strategies

Engaging in maladaptive coping strategies – such as drugs or alcohol consumption, or undertaking other forms of risky behaviour – were rarely reported by participants. Only one participant referenced experiences with explicit negative coping strategies such as these in the past. Otherwise, more maladaptive coping appeared to be associated with ruminating about family (as above), avoiding thinking about their separated family because it upset them too much, or tendencies to socially isolate or withdraw from vital daily activities.

"I try to forget them…. Yes because you know when I think about them I just gets really upset and I just want, I wish – that I could just go and see them, or that they just lived around the corner or something." (Participant 9)

"I keep promised my wife maybe next year things are going to be better. Our situations going to change to be better, maybe we're going to be together. My kids you know, my kids call me liar. So I can't be-feel comfortable with people even from my community. I try to escape from myself because I don't want to think about my family. When I go back home to my bed to sleep I always go back to think about them. So not my future, I forgot about my future." (Participant 4)

Theme 4.2: Support mechanisms

Sub-theme 4.2.1: Positive support mechanisms

Participants reflected on a number of critical positive support mechanisms utilized to cope with separation from their families. These included:

- Professional support: Including engaging professional mental health care services (such as seeing a psychologist or counsellor), legal services, government and NGOs including Red Cross. Accessing these services seemed to

benefit participants by helping them to process their difficult emotions, establish connections in the Australian community, and taking steps to realise goals through employment or study, even within the context of experiencing family separation.

- Support from family in Australia:

    "That's why I will say like, she doesn't know her [missing family member] whereabouts, but she has us. Like her children just make her happy, because after that she didn't have much, my dad died but he left things behind like us - that helped her." (Participant 16)

- Support from peers and community: A number of participants regularly communicated with their friends and community members, receiving social support.

Sub-theme 4.2.2: Negative support mechanisms and barriers to receiving support
A number of barriers were evident that prevented participants from receiving the right forms of support. These related to:

- Lack of information regarding community initiatives, preventing community connections.
- Practical barriers including English language skills.

    "Second one was my language, even now, see I'm using an interpreter to communicate with the Red Cross, which is a barrier." (Participant 10)

- Difficulty opening up to supportive others:

    "I don't discuss my family issues with any other parties or any other personnel and I haven't tried anything so far and I haven't applied anything." (Participant 30)

- Social isolation and disrupted social network on which to turn to for support

    "So I think that if my sisters and my mum they come to Australia it will be a bonus for me and as I say to you I don't have any social life, I don't associate with [North African country-of-origin] community here or any other people and I can't live my own life, and I'm working hard and trying to improve my life. In fact, very recently I had depression and when I had surgery here, and operation and when I had that operation I didn't have anyone to look after me and I was struggling by myself." (Participant 30)

Theme 4.3: Resilience
Despite the enormous toll that family separation placed on people, participants also displayed vast amounts of resilience – that is, being able to persevere and thrive in the face of their limitations and stress. There were a number of key factors that appeared to be associated with resilient outcomes, although it's important to note that direct causality is difficult to determine. Some of these factors emerged within other themes/sub-themes, but in this context, seem to be associated with resilient outcomes. These included:

Sub-theme 4.3.1: Hope for the future
A number of participants, despite experiencing many difficulties associated with their family separation, still expressed hope that their situation would improve in the future - including being reunited with family – and that this hope motivated them in their daily lives.

Notably, hope increased following receiving news about a separated family member or receiving support from professional services such as the Red Cross. Professional support seemed to be enhance resilience amongst participants, and their perception of being able to cope with their situation.

"So that is the Red Cross. For example I came to you and gave me hope. Everything changed. People need some small hope." (Participant 28)

Sub-theme 4.3.2: Taking concrete action

As noted in Theme 2.3 and Domain 3, acting to connect with missing or separated family members or working to support separated family members transferred a sense of agency to participants, and consequently, may be a factor associated with resilient outcomes. For example, being employed or having a sense of purpose is known to be linked to better mental health in general[9], and that may be the case for those experiencing family separation as well. One participant, whose entire family was living overseas and who worked multiple jobs to support them said:

> *"Six years without living with my family. But I'm thinking about the future of my kids. My daughter was 5 months only when I came here now she 7 years. My son 1 year, now he's 8 years, so now I'm just fighting for their future. Even if their future is unknown now as long as I'm here." (Participant 4)*

Sub-theme 4.3.3: Having some family in Australia

Having some family in Australia appeared to be a protective factor, enabling participants to receive direct family support and for participants to also focus on caring for their family, giving their life purpose and meaning despite being separated from other important family members.

> *"I know I will not give up my life. I have put up with all the problems, with all the health conditions and the diseases that I had. So I have tolerated everything up until now just not to lose my children, to be like a father for them until I have reached this country." (Participant 21)*

Importantly, some participants were also able to forge strong social relationships with non-family in Australia, who acted as proxy family for them.

Sub-theme 4.3.4: Recognizing opportunities in Australia

Finally, many participants noted that being in Australia afforded them significant opportunities in terms of their safety, wellbeing and to shape a meaningful future. Recognizing this appeared to be associated with some degree of resilience to the stressors of family separation.

> *What I can say is that Red Cross was the most [important] in my life to connect to my family. The other thing I can say is the Australian Government and the Australian people that accepted us to come to this country; now I can study, and I can work. (Participant 10)*

Summary and discussion of findings under Domain 4: Coping

The participants in this study displayed high levels of resourcefulness and a variety of coping strategies to respond to their situation of being separated from family. Many have partially adjusted by finding other sources of support. Others continued to struggle even over the long-term. Resilience in the face of ongoing family separation appeared to be connected with both psychological (i.e. retaining a sense of hope) and situational factors (e.g. having family in Australia).

How people cope with family separation and what measures might increase their resilience is an area Red Cross seeks to understand better. Coping with a missing family member requires a delicate balancing of hope and despair. While the themes around resourcefulness and strength are critical, the individual coping strategies vary greatly. Some people don't talk about their missing family members with anyone else but Red Cross. Others look for a safe space to discuss how to maintain family connection in difficult circumstances with others who understand the burdens and challenges. For some, a formal active search is initiated as soon as possible, but for others it can take years before they are ready to commence a search with Red Cross.

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[9] Flatau P, Galea J, Petridis R (2000). Mental Health and Wellbeing and Unemployment. *The Australian Economic Review,* 33(2), 161-181.

Additional contextual factors

A number of extenuating factors emerged from the interviews that appeared to affect how family separation impacted on participants. These factors, while not common to all participants, could shape how family separation affects psychological wellbeing, resilience and coping. These factors included:

- Conflict: A number of participant's families were still living in conflict-affected regions or in unsafe environments including refugee camps. This situational factor appeared to increase the potency of worries relating to the safety and wellbeing of family.
- Family issues: A number of participants detailed family circumstances that heightened the impact of family separation. For example, one participant recounted the experience of family conflict in Australia, affecting the stability of her living situation. A number of participants were concerned that separated family were growing older and would need care in their old age, which increased their stress relating to being separated from them.
- Illness and disability: Some separated family were experiencing ill-health or disability, enhancing the sense of responsibility and powerlessness felt by participants. Some participants were also in a caring role for sick or disabled family members in Australia.

Further research will be needed to unpack the contribution of these factors, amongst others, to the role that family separation plays in the settlement and wellbeing of forcibly displaced people.

Conclusions

The findings from this joint Australian Red Cross and UNSW Sydney study demonstrate that separation from family has a profound effect on forcibly displaced individuals. The most prominent effects were on psychological wellbeing, functioning and adjustment to life in Australia. Despite facing many difficulties associated with separation from family, participants also demonstrated signs of resourcefulness and resilience – although many encountered various practical barriers to taking direct action. Significant variation in the nature of the impact of separation emerged across individuals, and the quality of distress also varied depending on whether family was missing or separated, and a number of other contextual factors. These findings suggest that individuals may benefit from different forms of support as they engage in different phases of the RFL process and beyond. Certainly, the complex needs of people facing long-term separation suggests they might benefit from a variable support structure. It highlights the complexity of the needs of people facing long term separation, and the importance of understanding how these needs evolve over time through further research.

While providing new knowledge, this study also has a number of limitations and outstanding questions that could be addressed in future studies. While a qualitative investigation such as this provides deep insights into the personal effects of family separation, it is less clear how family separation specifically drives these impacts or whether there are other contributing factors including past trauma exposure. It also remains unknown how the effects of family separation and the needs of those experiencing separation change over time, nor what might be the impact ongoing family separation might have on the long-term settlement of refugees in Australia. Importantly, further research is required to understand how practices and policies can be optimized to support individuals facing long-term family separation.

APPENDICES
Semi-structured interview questions

1. Who is part of your family?
2. Who are you currently separated from or who have experienced separation from in the past?

	Relationship to participant	Current or past separation	Tick the selected separation experience for the interview
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			

For the remainder of the interview, I'd like to focus on the one experience of separation that bothers you most. This may be a past or current separation.

3. How did you get to be separated from them? What happened? (i.e. why are/were you separated? Were you separated from all of your family? If not, who did you have with you (i.e. not separated from)?
4. How long have you been/were you separated from your family?
   a. If reunited, how were you reunited with your family?
   b. If not reunited, what have you tried to do to reunite with your family?
5. How does it feel to be separated/have been separated from your family? What kind of impact has it had on you?
6. How has this impacted:
   ▪ a. the family members who are with you?
   ▪ b. the family members who you are/were separated from?
7. How much did/do you worry about your separated family members? (note: Worry refers to when thinking about family members to the point where this thinking dominates thoughts and interfered with concentration on other important activities such as work, study, taking care of other family etc).

Scale (1-5):
(Scale 1-5; 1= Do/did not worry at all;
2 = Worry/worried about family members a little bit of the time;
3= Worry-Worried about family members some of the time;
4 = worry/worried about family members quite a bit of time;
5 = Worry/worried about family members all the time (most of the day, every day). [Note: If currently separated, could be current level of worry; or else overall degree of worry over course of separation]

8. When you are (or were) thinking about your separated family members, wat do you worry about?
9. Has being separated from your family affected/ affects the way you interact with other people around you i.e.

friends, colleagues, community members? How so? Also, how much has it affected you socially? (Scale 1-5; 1= Did not affect me at all; 5 = Had an extreme effect on me socially)

10. Do/did you have other people in your life who stepped into the role of a family member for you? E.g. a friend, neighbour, case-worker, counsellor, medical professional, co-worker, etc.
    c. If you didn't have this support, how do you think you would have managed?
11. Have you had/did you have to assume a different role within your family because of being separated from your family? What was this role, and how did it affect you directly? (E.g. care-giver, bread-winner, head of household, decision-maker, oldest sibling responsibilities, etc)
12. Has being separated from your family had any impact on how you live or express your culture, religion or personal values? If, yes, how so?? (e.g. worry about continuity of cultural practices)
13. While you have been/were separated, have you been in contact with your separated family members?
    d. How often did you keep in contact? (i.e. frequency)
    e. How did you keep in contact? (i.e. mode of contact)
    f. What was your contact like? Did you/do you find it helpful or distressing to be in contact with family members?
14. Do you feel a sense of responsibility to your separated family members? If yes, describe what sort of responsibility you feel? (e.g. could be practical, material or financial responsibility, could be emotional protection such as not sharing the reality of their current circumstances with them).
15. Are there or were there family members that you are separated from and you don't know where they are?
    g. What is the impact of not knowing on you?
16. How do you cope with being separated from your family? What do you do that helps you?
17. What has been helpful to you in the process of reunifying with family? What has not been helpful and have there been any barriers?
18. Why do you think it's important for migrant or refugee families to be together? Why is it important to you?

Participant characteristics

	Category	N (%)
Sex	Male	5 (38.5%)
	Female	8 (61.5%)
Country-of-origin	Ethiopia	5 (38.5%)
	Eretria	2 (15.4%)
	DRC	1 (7.7%)
	Sudan	1 (7.7%)
	Malaysia	1 (7.7%)
	Afghanistan	1 (7.7%)
	Unknown	2 (15.4%)
State of residence in Australia	NSW	3 (23.1%)
	Victoria	5 (38.5%)
	South Australia	1 (7.7%)
	Queensland	1 (7.7%)
	Western Australia	3 (23.1%)
Nature of current separation	Previous missing family members; contact restored	7 (53.8%)
	Family members missing; separated from other family	4 (30.8%)
	Separated from family	1 (7.7%)
	Missing family	1 (7.7%)
Who separated from	Parents & siblings	9 (69.2%)
	Spouse	1 (7.7%)
	Children	1 (7.7%)
	Spouse and children	1 (7.7%)
	Uncle	1 (7.7%)
Mean length of separation		17.1 years (SD 11.96), range 4-47 years
Some family in Australia	Yes	8 (61.5%)
	No	4 (30.8%)
	Unknown	1 (7.7%)