

Navigating Economic Self-Sufficiency in Washington State: The Capabilities Approach and
Employment Services for Refugee Women

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Study

By the end of 2015, global mass displacement reached a record high of 65.3 million people, of whom 21.3 million were classified as refugees (Zong & Batalova, 2017). A refugee, as defined by the United Nations, is a person who has “been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence”, “a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group”, and “cannot return home or are afraid to do so” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). In response, actors around the world are concerned with supporting displaced peoples and refugees. Since 1975, 3.3 million refugees have resettled permanently in the United States (US) and federal programs operate resettlement social services for them (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

The politics around all immigration policy relating to refugee status are debated between dominate political parties in the US and policies produced direct operations towards their stances on the matter. In response to the global humanitarian crisis, the Obama administration increased the number of refugees accepted into the US from 85,000 in FY 2016 to 110,000 in FY 2017 (Blizzard and Batalova, 2019). Meanwhile, more recently under the Trump administration, President Trump by issue of executive order changed the refugee admission ceiling for FY 2017 to 50,000 (Executive Order 13780 “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United State”), suspending the resettlement program for 120 days, enhancing the vetting procedures for refugee admissions, and granting state and local jurisdictions a role in the process for determining refugee placement in their jurisdiction (Blizzard and Batalova, 2019). Implementation of President Trump’s executive order was

blocked in federal court, however, the order alone is argued to likely have contributed to the decline in refugee admissions in the US: within the first 7 months of FY 2017, there was a significant drop in refugee arrivals: 2,070 refugees arrived in March 2017 compared to 6,229 during the same month a year earlier as well as 3,316 refugees arrived in April 2017 compared to 4,857 in April 2016 (Blizzard and Batalova, 2019). These are the results of a political divide between the dominant political parties over how US immigration policy should function, particularly in regard to refugee resettlement (Rubenzer, 2017).

Regardless of the political positions of dominant parties on the number of admitted refugees into the US, the nation-state is obligated as a signatory of the 1967 Protocol of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1968 to ensure the right to human dignity, which includes the right to work (Rubenzer, 2017). With the global humanitarian crisis and US action in mind, this study broadly investigates how refugees are supported in the workforce in the US. This study focuses on economic and employment opportunities for refugees in their new countries and how these opportunities are understood by employment service organizations' use of self-sufficiency as a measure of well-being. The emphasis here will be on the concept of Economic Self-Sufficiency as a measure of organizational success to ensure refugee well-being. This is especially a concern as underemployment and lower incomes are major issues among resettled refugees. In terms of underemployment, "...educational attainment generally correlates with income and other socioeconomic indicators, although many highly educated immigrants are underemployed, particularly in sectors where formal credentials and certifications are highly valued" (Capps et al., 2017, 19). Capps further explains:

“despite relatively high attainment and employment rates, refugees have lower incomes than other immigrants. Refugees' median household income in 2009-11 was \$42,000

about \$3,000 below other immigrations and \$8,000 less than the median for the U.S. born. More concerning is that recent refugees' incomes have dropped relative to those of the U.S. born. This gap suggests that the income gains observed among earlier arrivals may not be replicated for those who arrived more recently. Refugees who arrived in the United States between 1995 and 2000 had median household incomes equivalent to 62 percent of U.S.-born household incomes, as measures in the 2000 Census; but refugees who had been in the United States for five years or less in 2009-11 had median incomes equal to 42 percent of the U.S. born" (Capps et al., 2017, 21).

This study examines how ESS is used as a metric for employment services for refugee women. Women are the focus of this study as it is recognized that: "women are often the first responders to a crisis and play a central role in the survival and resilience of families and communities. Studies show that when women are included in humanitarian action, the entire community benefits" (UN Women, 2016). Washington state could be an example of an interesting case study because of its notable number of refugees resettled. According to the 2017 Department of Homeland Security, Washington state is ranked as the third state out of all the states with the largest population of resettled refugees per capita (Annual Report DHS).

This study suggests that ESS coupled with a measurement of capability could better inform decision-makers on creating policy and programs for refugee women. Studies have shown that understanding the experience and needs of refugee women have positive effects on informing decision-makers on how to better support refugee women (Watcher et al., 2015; Ott, 2015; Kramer, 2011). The Capabilities Approach (CA), as described by Martha Nussbaum, could be used as a framework for further informing decision-makers on program structuring in regard to these issues. The CA is described as a "quality-of-life-assessment" by asking, "what is

each person able to do and to be?” (Nussbaum 2011). The CA is useful in that it asks which capabilities are most important, it can be used in the process of identifying aspects of disadvantage, and addresses the roles of both the state and other stakeholders in the development of society (Nussbaum 2011; Wolff & De-Shalit 2007; Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam & Mtshali 2018). To explore this area, this study focuses on the Department of Labor’s contractual relationship in Washington state between Workforce Snohomish (WFS) and Refugee Immigrant Services Northwest (RISNW). The research presented here utilizes a focus group composed of refugee women to inform a needs assessment of WFS and RISNW’s capacities.

1.2 Government Contracted Employment Services

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is a major federal initiative through the Department of Labor (DOL) that is involved with administering workforce development initiatives in Washington state and across all other states in the US. The WIOA “...brings together, in strategic coordination, the core programs of Federal investment in skill development...authorizes programs for specific vulnerable populations...and replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and retains and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973” (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). In Washington state, the Workforce Innovation is implemented by the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECD). The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board states that for Washington state, the “WIOA was designed to improve the quality of the workforce, increase economic self-sufficiency, and reduce welfare dependency, meet employer skill requirements, and enhance the nation’s productivity and competitiveness” (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act). These efforts are coordinated uniquely among

counties to fit their workforce needs accordingly. In Snohomish county, the WorkSource centers are operated by Workforce Snohomish which also contracts with local organizations to provide employment services.

Its contract with the local NGO, RISNW, sets out one of WFS's service relationships. These types of subcontract relationships are said to reflect the "fiscal pressure, globalization, changing ideas regarding public management, citizen pressure for improved service quality and efficiency, and new demands for inclusion by previously excluded groups and individuals" and "the 1980s of economics and market theory on governance" (Smith 2007; Johnston & Romzek 2010). This restructuring, also known as "new public management", positions government institutions to tightly hold organizations accountable for reaching goals while loosely regulating organizational procedures (Lægreid 2015). Through this, RISNW offers employment services with an emphasis on multicultural and culturally appropriate approaches while reaching contracted goals. The contracted agreement between WFS and RISNW is directed at supporting clients to achieve economic self-sufficiency and their program goals involve the number of program participants employed and their wage (Contract 18-RISNW-X-362-Adult, Statement of Work, Exhibit A Part 1, 2018; Contract 18-RISNW-X-363-DW, Statement of Work, Exhibit A Part 1, 2018). The contract also outlines that the process to supporting participants is done through a customer-centric philosophy, where staff is trained and dedicated to paying close attention to the individual needs of their clients (Contract 18-RISNW-X-362-Adult, Statement of Work, Exhibit A Part 2, 2018; Contract 18-RISNW-X-363-DW, Statement of Work, Exhibit A Part 2, 2018). The type of relationship between the organizations and the nature of the contract provides for organizations to uniquely provide specialized services for direct client needs and it is this that this study explores for refugee women.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Refugee Resettlement and Refugee Women

Several studies discuss factors that influence how women identified by refugee status are positioned in their new country and how they are positioned while working in a new country of residence (Koyama, 2015; Walter et al., 2016; Potocky-Tripodi, 2003). In a study with refugee women in New York, Koyama (2015) examines the construction of gender when “refugee women from Sub-Saharan Africa (Eritrea, Somalia, and Democratic Republic of Congo), Bhutan, and Burma enter the paid workforce and contribute economically to their families and communities” (Koyama, 2015, 259). This study aimed to understand the different ways refugee women “... are ideologically assembled by others, and also how they construct, rework, and embed their gender identities and roles within gendered workforce training and employment settings” (Koyama, 2015, 259). Gender is identified as a factor that organizes and mediates refugee resettlement through assemblage which are “...the ways in which social processes materialize or animate knowledge, identities, and action” (Koyama, 2015, 259). This study finds that tensions manifest between gendered and familial roles when refugee women operate within their new environments (Koyama, 2015). Even though refugee women push against these assembled social constraints, gendered issues are “...embedded in the negotiations as refugees struggle to attain economic self-sufficiency in the variable contexts” (Koyama, 2015, 273).

Another study identified the pre- and post-migration experiences of refugee women [Congolese women under the women-at-risk designation] to inform service practitioners to better provide services for “...healthy, multidimensional integration of refugee families into US communities” (Wachter et al., 2016, 878). Women shared with the researchers their social and financial difficulties living in their new environment such as a single parent raising children

while being financially responsible for their household and challenges with paying for basic expenses. These particularly included “housing costs, low-wage incomes, limited English proficiency, and challenges with childcare” (Wachter et al., 2016, 883). Additionally, employed refugee women expressed a desire to work in professions outside of housekeeping or low-paying jobs “...seeing ‘no future’ in struggling from one day to another to make ends meet” (Wachter et al., 2016, 884). Wachter et al. (2016) even found that service providers reported that rising housing costs and low-paying jobs have become a more prominent concern than unemployment. Overall, Wachter et al. (2016) finds that “...pre- and post-migration experiences intersect and often compound the challenges Congolese women face as they seek to integrate into the new society” (884). With this in mind, this study suggests that social workers should work at the policy level and form “...a more holistic understanding of what makes for so-called successful resettlement and integration” otherwise, in this case, refugee women are instead positioned to be employed and economically self-sufficient without consideration of their own and families’ well-being and quality of life (Wachter et al., 2016, 886-7).

More generally, Potocky-Tripodi (2003) examined the “...relative influence of demographic characteristics, flight-related characteristics, host-related characteristics, residency characteristics, acculturation characteristics, and adaption stresses upon refugees’ employment status and estimated earnings” of refugees residing in Minneapolis-St. Paul’s metropolitan areas (63). This study also specifically tested Kuhlman’s 1991 theoretical model of refugee adaptation which suggests that

“... refugee economic adaptation (typically operationalized through outcome indicators of economic status such as employment, welfare utilization, and income) is a function of six factors: (a) demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnicity, educational

attainment, and household composition; (b) flight-related characteristics such as cause of flight, type of movement, and attitude toward displacement; (c) host-related characteristics, such as economic conditions, ethnic composition, and attitudes toward the refugees within the host society; (d) policy characteristics, including international, national, regional, and local policies and their implementation; (e) residency characteristics, including length of residence and secondary migration (movement within the host country); and (f) non-economic aspects of adaptation, such as adaptation stresses and acculturation characteristics.” (Potocky-Tripodi, 2003, 64).

It was found that “...demographic characteristics, in particular, education, gender, and household composition, had the largest effects on the indicators of economic adaptation” (Potocky-Tripodi, 2003, 63). Potocky-Tripodi (2003) suggest that resettlement policies, programs and practices that facilitate and are involved with refugee resettlement should focus on supporting refugees within the demographic characteristics found as influential to economic adaptation (84-87).

All in all, studies on refugee resettlement and refugee women find that understanding the experiences of refugees important in supporting refugees, especially refugee women, with employment services. Importantly, it is noted that there is a need for more holistic policies that support refugees with the employment services. These policies should be formed with an understanding on how refugees are positioned in their new environments and how government and organization policies are involved with defining the arenas refugees operate in. Additionally, gendered roles and cultural roles need to be considered as refugees, especially refugee women, continue with their own tradition while they navigate resettlement.

2.2 Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS)

When considering the structural approaches to supporting refugees and refugee women with the economic aspects of resettlement, ESS is one measurement used. Studies often focus on ESS for poverty alleviation more generally, even though ESS is used as a measurement for refugees' economic well-being as well. Approaches to defining a measurement of ESS vary, with the ultimate goal to create holistic measurements (Hetling and Postmus, 2015; Rossi and Curtis, 2013). For example, Hetling and Postmus (2015) position the measurement of ESS as a person who is able to meet basic needs without the use of public assistance and reach national governmental and international ESS goals. With their study, they tested the SESS-14 scale, similar to the original Gowdy and Pearlmuter 1933 scale using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and bivariate correlations with low-income intimate partner violence survivors (Hetling and Postmus, 2015). They find that there is a need for a clear and concise definition of ESS that can be used broadly to enclose short and long-term financial well-being and the ability to meet basic needs.

Meanwhile, Rossi and Curtis (2013), approach ESS by asking, "...at what level of income and resources does a household stop being 'poor' and become supported by adult residents who 'make a living'?" (111). They find that "...using a living wage benchmark for measuring income inadequacy should replace poverty measure to better describe a continuum from poorest households to those who have achieved at least minimal self-sufficiency" (Rossi and Curtis, 2013, 110). They discuss alternative measures applied by various organizations such as self-sufficiency standards like the NAS model by Diana Pearce (former director of Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)), Basic Family Budget Calculator by the Economic Policy Institute, Yearly Housing Wage by the National Low Income Housing Coalitions, and the basic economic security tables (BEST) by WOW. However, they argue that "using the gap between

the highest poverty measure calculated and a comparable living wage as the benchmark of income inequality” could help us understand how to support those living in conditions of poverty by more accurately capturing the actual number of people living in those conditions that the currently poverty line fails to capture (Rossi and Curtis, 2013, 125). Ultimately, Rossi and Curtis (2013) end by suggesting that a living wage benchmark would use an “Income Inequality Index” as powerful tool favorable to local community labor concerns because it could potentially educate “the populace about the wage inequities in specific geographic areas” and “...raise consciousness about the plight of the poor and the working poor” (Rossi and Curtis, 2013, 125-126). In turn, this would pressure the local legislative level that “...there is a wrong to be redressed” (Rossi and Curtis, 2013, 126).

Lastly, some studies have examined the impact of rapid ESS expectations on the well-being of refugee women. Hess et al. (2012) explores the culturally specific perspectives on trauma and recovery among Burundian, Congolese, and Iraqi refugees resettled in the US and how they index normalcy and self-sufficiency, the meaning of productivity and work and how they create security that facilitates the healing process. In their study, the analytical method is positioned in a constructivist grounded theory approach and builds on classic theory to state that they understand that analysis is an interpretive process. They use both researcher and participant perspectives to co-construct theory, and their coding process was inductive (Hess et al., 2012). Work was mentioned more than any other theme in relation to recovery and indicated that participation in the workforce was associated with productivity, normalcy, and well-being by participants as well as related to being able to take care of one’s basic needs (Hess et al., 2012). In this way, ESS is understood as a part of health and well-being as work also served as an important function of providing relief and recovery (Hess et al., 2012). Refugee women in

this study described a “full life” by including other aspects of work such as pursuing educational goals, being engaged with others, and contributing to self-efficacy and familial and societal well-being (Hess et al., 2012). On the other hand, refugee women also stated their gender roles and expectations around work, education, caregiving, and productivity and the challenges they experience when confronting these expectations and functioning in their new environments (Hess et al., 2012). Ultimately, Hess et al. (2012) affirm the work of scholars such as Herman (1992) “...who emphasize the importance of establishing a feeling of safety before healing can occur” and adds to the literature “...by revealing some of the ways in which other forms of productivity should be valued as ‘work’ in resettlement policies to contribute to establishing a sense of safety for refugees” as “...refugees agree that engaging in work is important for overall mental health” (Hess et al., 2012).

In the end, studies on the measurement ESS find that economic stability and well-being are coupled. Moreover, they find that defining ESS, understanding the social and physical landscapes that people operate in, and broadening ESS beyond economic measurements as necessary.

2.3 The Capabilities Approach (CA)

Studies on the Capabilities Approach (CA) are one area of the literature that brings together a holistic understanding of well-being and ESS. Amartya Sen played a major intellectual role in framing the CA and can be recognized by the use of CA in the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme and in annual Human Development Reports (Nussbaum, 2011, 17). This study uses the CA developed by Nussbaum (2011) as a core starting point to understanding CA. The CA approach is understood by asking, “...what are people actually able to do and to be? What real opportunities are available to

them?” and starts “...close to the ground, looking at life stories and the human meaning of policy changes for real people. Developing policies that are truly pertinent to a wide range of human situations means attending to diverse factors that affect the quality of human life...”

(Nussbaum, 2011, Preface X-14). This approach also focuses on

“...choice or freedom, holding that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not exercise in action: the choice is theirs. It thus commits itself to respect for people’s powers of self-definition”

and

“pluralist about value: it holds that the capability achievements that are central for people are different in quality, not just quantity; that they cannot without distortion be reduced to a single numerical scale; and that a fundamental part of understanding and producing them is understanding the specific nature of each” (Nussbaum, 2011, 18-19).

However, the role CA for organized efforts isn’t to form a comprehensive assessment of the quality of life in society because of political liberalism, but instead, to formalize a list or make assessments of minimal social justice (Nussbaum, 2011, 20). In doing so, Nussbaum identifies: basic capabilities, combined capabilities, internal capabilities, central capabilities and functioning (Nussbaum, 2011, 21-34). Nussbaum’s CA “focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity” which “...must be done by discussing the relationship of the putative entitlement to other existing entitlements, in a long and detailed process (Nussbaum, 2011, 32).

Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) build on the CA approach by aiming to “provide practical guidance to policy makers by providing a version of egalitarian theory that can be applied to

actual social policy” (3). They do so by outlining the pluralistic theory of disadvantage and identify areas of disadvantage and best points for intervention. They begin by stating that:

“unless it can be shown that social equality - such as relations of community and solidarity between people - is good for the people who live in that society, it is very hard to see its point. Hence we need to identify the goods which, once realised by equal relations, contribute to individual well-being. Social equality and inequality, then, is something which makes individual lives go better or worse, by affecting their sense of belonging to society or connection with others; what we shall later call ‘affirmation’”

and

“by designating those who lack access to some goods (for example, those lacking employment) ‘disadvantaged’ we immediately locate these people in relation to others; but moreover, we also hint that by lacking or losing such access their disadvantage may well have been created by others, or, if not, is at least tolerated by them. We therefore analyse their situation within the context of a community of people who may or may not care about each other. We also assume that their situation is not a natural outcome of some inevitable ‘law of nature’ (for example, that there will always be some people who must be much worse off than others) but rather has to do with the social and political institutions in which they happen to live” (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007, 6-7).

The study’s main revision to the CA approach is that “... what matters for an individual is not only the level of functionings he or she enjoys at any particular time, but also their prospects for sustaining that level. To put this in another way, exceptional risk and vulnerability is itself a disadvantage, whether or not the feared event ever actually happens (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007, 9). Moreover,

“the theoretical conclusion of [the book], then, is that if improving the lives of the least advantaged, governments can achieve a general declustering of disadvantage to the point where we can no longer say who in society is worst off overall, then they have every reason to claim that they have moved society significantly in the direction of equality. Moreover, we suggest that a good way of doing this would be to search for what we call ‘corrosive disadvantages’ (namely disadvantage the presence of which yields further disadvantages) and ‘fertile functions’ (i.e. those functionings the securing of which is likely to secure further functions) and to pay special attention to these. Such a strategy would make policy as cost effective and efficient as possible (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007, 10).

The approach and terms used in this study are aimed to bring the theory of CA into the arena of policy application.

Meanwhile, Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali (2018) furthers the CA literature by using it to analyze the political philosophical debates between libertarian and communitarian as well as the state centered approach versus the state-in society approach. They do so by examining the role of the state and civil society by exploring “...the theoretical debates on agency roles of the different stakeholders in society’s poverty alleviation and development arena” and aims to help us understand the different roles of both the state and civil society, “who engage in providing public good, for example, in addressing the issue of poverty and underdevelopment” (Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali, 2018, 76). By focusing on agency through the CA, this study analyzes how the state and other organizations “...play a role in agency promotion...” and act as “‘conversion mechanisms’ towards realising real capabilities of people” (Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali, 2018, 80), Conversion Mechanisms are

defined as “...agents of transformation (individuals, groups, institutions), those agents who utilise their structures to transform resources towards engineering positive change in different spheres of society” (Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali, 2018, 80). With this in mind, the study finds that the CA sheds light on the shortcomings of the state-centered approach because “...the state could be considered to be another social force working towards a particular good” (Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali, 2018). On the other hand, they find that CA “conceives societies’ good to go beyond a liberal and utilitarian understanding of economic good” and this allows for the CA theories to position non state agents’ with significant duties of justice (Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali, 2018, 90-91). So, the state in society approach aligns in that the role of nonstate actors as agents of justice is important because the state does not operate in all areas of society strongly and so cannot facilitate alone (Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali, 2018, 90-91). In the end, Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali (2018) suggest that assessing the effectiveness in benefiting all areas of society by partnership between states and nonstate actors to determine at what extent there is mutual empowerment would further ground the CA “as an evaluative and analytical framework in poverty alleviation and development studies” (91).

Literature on CA suggest ways of understanding how all actors in positioned in relation to when they are organized for communities and individuals with ultimate goals to better ensure justice and that human dignity is upheld in their services. CA offers a holistic approach philosophically and structurally that organizations can apply to ESS as a measurement of well-being.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The gaps highlighted in ESS and CA literature provide for an opportunity to see how they can inform each other into a combined and more holistic understanding of what self-sufficiency entails. Coupling CA with the measurement of ESS is applied through analyzing the responses of refugee women in a focus group on how they navigate ESS in the US. This study uses the framework of CA to identify points of program intervention through a needs assessment that are not fully captured with ESS alone.

Focus group methodology is used to understand the ways that refugee women navigate the workforce in their new environment and how ESS is involved in the process. In collaboration with RISNW, five refugee women who were receiving support from RISNW participated in the focus group and two interpreters were present. Three women were from Congo and two were from Ethiopia. The languages translated by the interpreters were French and Lingala to English as well as Amharic to English. One limitation to this specific focus group methodology comes from the need to translate the participant's responses for analysis which adds a layer to data analysis (Barbour & Kitinger, 1999; Hennink 2013). To address this limitation, questions and follow-up questions were modeled with this limitation in mind and discussions with interpreters surrounded detailed understanding of participant responses.

During the focus group, prompting questions on economic self-sufficiency, work, employment concerns, and concerns about employment services were asked in the duration of 1 and a half hours. With participant's approvals, the focus group was audio recorded and transcribed. Then qualitative analysis was conducted by identifying themes within each ethnic group's responses separately. Similarities and differences were analyzed overall. Three major categories were identified from the focus group involving refugee women: work and

independence, challenges with self-sufficiency and finding work in Washington state, and suggested useful program services long-term career goals. These categories were identified by how participants expressed their experience with navigating the workforce and ESS in Washington state. Their experiences also highlight how well-being is maintained and the parts that make up well-being that are faltering by factors related to migrating to a culturally different society and participating in the workforce of that society as refugee women. Analysis identified how refugee women navigate employment in the US with ESS in mind and then the feasibility of the CA as a tool to inform decision-makers on specific areas to pay attention to for program policy intervention is discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Categories and CA/ESS Analysis

Work and Independence

Both Congolese and Ethiopian refugee women in this study identified work with the ability to be independent. For both groups, independence was described by the ability to support their families and basic needs. Ethiopian refugee women participants understood their position in relation to the community as a whole, they state “when a person works, they are helping the community to be dependent on her – mutual benefit”. In other words, independency is described to be dependent on their relationship with the community. Meanwhile, one Congolese refugee woman describes how working allows her to have physical mobility in their environment. Another Congolese refugee states that working creates the opportunity to be independent by pursuing her career goals such as starting her own company or working in a specific field. However, both groups expressed that in their current position, they have no choice in the matter of job prospects and are willing to work any job as long as they are able to secure a decent job

as soon as possible. A decent job was described as one that allowed them to be independent in the ways described above.

Challenges with Self-Sufficiency and Finding Work in Washington state

When discussing concerns with working and finding a job in Washington state, both Congolese and Ethiopian women expressed the difficulties of navigating child-care and work schedules. One refugee woman from Ethiopia describes this concern in detail to our translator:

“it’s kind of hard to find exactly what kind of job we need because the area we live in, location, and sometimes they may offer you the job but it’s not much and it’s not where we wanted to work because we have children and it’s hard to take care of the children because of the time they offer them. It’s not convenient for them at all.”

Moreover, the challenges that came with the high cost of child-care was also mentioned. One Congolese refugee woman states that the high cost of child-care coupled with familial obligations, like helping with care of their family abroad, made it nearly impossible to save money for themselves or for their children. She describes the challenges with becoming self-sufficient in detail:

“I want to work, if I get a part-time job its ok. The welfare office support me in child-care. I’m a single mom but if I want to get a full-time job then the welfare office will cut off my childcare and as an immigrant here I have to pay child-care so I will stay home without job then go back to the assistance. This is a big thing for us. So how can I be self-sufficient if I have to work and have money and I have to work for child-care. We want to find a job because here in this country if you don’t work it is hard to take care of your family. We really want to work and take care of our family. I had a job, when I had

a job, I'm a single mom first. You want to work to become self-sufficient and then when I started working the first thing the child-care wanted me to pay more money. So, I cannot have savings in my account and besides us we have family back home we have some time to support because we have parents back home. We don't have any savings we don't have any money to become self-sufficient. I have children I need to save money for but when I have a job I need to spend all expenses go out because nothing you can save, so what can you do?"

The Ethiopian refugee women specifically state that low paying jobs make it very difficult to be self sufficient. They share how, especially in-home care jobs, immigrants are often undercompensated for their work: "More advantage for them than for us, even though we help them work for them we don't get paid enough. We understand, we just doing the job". Additionally, they note that it is difficult to secure a job because while in search for a job, they do not receive calls back from firms when promised or language barriers make it difficult to move forward with job opportunities.

The Congolese refugee women discussed the differences in work culture from previous to that in the US. Adjusting to unpredictable work schedules and longer hours with lower pay was mentioned as one challenge. One Congolese woman speaks to the effects of working long, physically exhausting hours with low-pay: "you know, I have to take time to take a break for myself if I work for so long then I will be tired and, the same thing, we would never have time to talk to our child if we are working. We will never have time to see our family. So, the better way is to have time to stay with kids and have family, it would be to have our own schedule and spend time with family, and also, we are a human body and the body also has requests, we need to do our thing for ourselves".

Suggested Useful Program Services and Long-term Career Goals

The Ethiopian refugee women expressed that a resource that would be useful is to be connected with organizations with relationships with firms providing jobs. A translator explains in detail one participant's thoughts on what kind of program would be useful:

“They say there are some resources out there which they look for you a job, so we don't know how to get to them. Is there any way to find those people who find you a job? Easier for them to get a job through a company like that. I know there are some resources out there and they look for you a job and request you for the job. That kind of company would be helpful for us, quick job. They try to do for themselves and they try and call them, and they never call them back.”

Job training or a pathway to a job quickly was a resource that all refugee women expressed as useful. Some Congolese refugee women stated that they were interested in working in fields similar to what they had been doing previously in their home country or would like training to work in the same field of work. Even though refugee women were mostly concerned with finding a job initially and finding a job that paid enough for their needs, they also expressed other personal long-term goals. Two Congolese refugee women expressed their interest in running their own business and how their ultimate goal was to be able to operate one on their own. A translated response from one Congolese refugee woman participant explains the benefit of owning a business that would help them solve other related issues: “get out and going depending to some schedule is always hard so the better way it would be to make our own company, our own business”.

4.2 CA and ESS

The CA coupled with ESS can be used as a method to inform decision-makers on program policies to support refugee women. First, both Nussbaum (2011) as well as Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali (2018) state the importance of framing the way that individuals and organizations function. From the individual perspective, Nussbaum (2011) highlights that CA begins with recognizing that people should have the freedom to choose and organized policies should work towards protecting and supporting individuals in maintaining capabilities and functioning (the means to realize a capability). Meanwhile, from an organizational perspective, Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali (2018) add to CA by focusing on the role of the state and non governmental organizations that act in a more communal oriented than liberal fashion. The refugee women in this study both acknowledge their individual position as well as their position in their communities as a whole just as CA suggests these relationships exist. Refugee women in this study acknowledged that they do not have a choice in their job prospects in Washington state. When considering Nussbaum's contributions to CA, this suggests that these women must operate within systems that create situations of injustice to them because they do not have the ability to choose. This suggests that there is a need for policy intervention to better support refugee women. Additionally, the refugee women recognize that they are a part of a community and position organizations as agents of social justice just as Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam and Mtshali (2018) find. The refugee women in this study recognize that organizations have access to a network, beyond what is available on their own, and recognize that these organizations and the state as social agents that act for the benefit of each community member. However, in the case of the Ethiopian refugee women, they recognize their disadvantage in terms of finding a job and the type of work they are able to secure. As Wolff and de-Shalit state, these do not happen by chance but are disadvantaged by the social and

political institutions they operate in (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). All in all, this suggests that ESS cannot only be concerned with pay but also choice, autonomy, type of work, and relationship to one's community.

A combined use of CA and ESS can also be used to find points of policy intervention. As Nussbaum states that one way to identify these points is by comparing assumed entitlements to other entitlements (Nussbaum 2011). Wolff and de-Shalit build on this by adding that functioning and capability are not important in their own but also identifying whether or not individuals have the "prospects for sustaining that level" (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). With this in mind, a point of intervention include the refugee women's trade-offs between work and childcare. Especially with the refugee women reporting the various ways that they are unable to sustain both and how doing so affects other areas of their livelihood including: their ability to save money, their mental health, their ability to do things for themselves, limited to no quality time with their children and family members, time to rest from physical exhaustion, and taking on low-paying jobs.

Lastly, Wolff and de-Shalit suggest that disadvantages exist in clusters and breaking these clusters will move society significantly towards equality (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). They offer two tools that can be applied to this study to tackle these clusters: identifying corrosive disadvantages and fertile functions. Corrosive disadvantage, disadvantages that provide for further disadvantages, identified from the focus group are when individuals have language barriers and no pathway to getting a driver's license. On the other hand, fertile functions, functionings that are likely to secure other functions when secured, are programs that would support refugee women with building skills to be competitive for higher paying jobs, job training opportunities, and connecting to organizations with direct job opportunities. Moreover,

long-term career planning was a concern for some refugee women. An example of what fertile functioning could look like would be to support refugee women so that they are able to tangibly plan for the start of their own business.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The two organizations involved with this study have mechanisms in place that reflect aspects of CA through their customer-centered philosophy and the services provided through RISNW's philosophy on providing culturally appropriate services. The CA framework can be used by these kinds of organizations involved with Department of Labor contracts by challenging them to consider how self-sufficiency is positioned through all the options made available to people through their services and the services offered in greater locality. By considering this, practitioners can more holistically understand their clients' needs and what it takes for them to maintain self-sufficiency in their locality.

In the end, this study suggests that CA and ESS can be combined and applied to inform organizations on developing program policies. Literature in ESS state that there is a need for a more holistic approach and CA can be used to fill this gap. This study combines and applies it to the case of refugee women navigating the workforce in Washington state. Overall, this study uses CA to frame the measurement of ESS and is used to analyze how it can be used to inform government and non-government organizations to support refugee women.

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Appendix

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CONSENT FORM

Partnered with
Refugee Immigrant Services Northwest
and
Workforce Snohomish

Researcher Contact information:

Angela Yun: ayun15@uw.edu

Master's Candidate, Master of Arts in Policy Studies

RESEARCH STATEMENT

This study is a needs-based assessment to better understand refugee women's economic self-sufficiency and empowerment needs. The goal of this project is to identify these various needs and how organizations in a government contracted relationship, like Refugee Immigrant Services Northwest and Workforce Snohomish, can better offer services to reach shared workforce development goals. These insights will be gathered through focus groups conducted in partnership with Refugee Immigrant Services Northwest.

You are invited to participate in this project as much or as little as you want. You don't have to answer any questions if you don't want to and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. You can also ask questions any time, during the focus group, or after. If you have any questions or concerns—please contact me at ayun15@uw.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Division at (203) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will be invited to participate in a focus group at Refugee Immigrant Services Northwest. The focus group will take about 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete. There will be one facilitator and one translator present. Complimentary lunch will be provided. You will be asked prompting questions about economic self-sufficiency, empowerment, your success/challenges with job searching in the United States, and desired skills. To ensure complete and accurate data collection, the focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed. The focus group will be recorded unless you expressly request otherwise. Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report made public, any information that will make it possible to identify you will

not be included. Audio recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed, which will be within three months of recording.

RISKS

To protect your rights and well-being, we have to tell you about any risks that our study might present. For this study, we do not foresee this interview posing any risks to participants than what you already experience in everyday life or in discussing collecting community information for your own use or consumption. However, if at any time you feel the need to end your participation in the focus group or want to skip a question, you are free to do so.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

In helping to inform this study, participants will be helping to build the basis for a better understanding of different approaches on workforce development, economic self-sufficiency, and empowerment.

INTERVIEW PERMISSION/CONSENT

I hereby grant permission to be interviewed and recorded within a focus group as part of research for the capstone research project facilitated through the University of Washington Bothell’s (UWB) MA in Policy Studies program. I give permission to use this focus group as follows:

- To share with other UWB students and faculty for purposes of discussion and analysis.
- To inform a report about workforce development, economic self-sufficiency, and empowerment.
- Unless noted otherwise, to be included in the form of direct quotes and transcripts.

I understand that this interview may be used in the way indicated through my agreement to participate in this focus group. This agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties.

Your Name (printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interview Transcript

Participants: 5	PC: From Congo (1-3)	IC-2: French/Lingala Interpreter
Interpreters: 2	PE: From Ethiopia (2)	IE-1: Amharic Interpreter

R: Researcher/Interviewer (1)

R: During this time, I will ask about 5 main questions with some follow up questions about work. Please feel free to respond at any time and discuss whatever comes to mind from the questions. Okay, alright. Our first question is: What is important to you when you think about work and working? And it can be more than one thing.

IE-1: [PE1] Work is very important to us. First of all for our self, community. So we can support our family and basic daily life necessity.

R: I'm wondering if they can speak more about how it is important for yourself and community? An example maybe?

IC-2: According to [PC1], job is very important because if I have job then I can take care of my family and I help my kids and job really gives you independency to go out.

And then for [PC2], job is good for life because it gives you independency.

R: I'm wondering if they would be comfortable with sharing an example of what that looks like?

IC-2: Example for what?

R: They said it's very important for independence and I'm wondering if they can share more an example to explain a bit more about what that looks like.

IE-1: [PE1-2] They say it's very important for ourself and the person who we work for especially when we take care of elderly people, we help them a lot. How to survive and how to help themselves. So it helps both sides. It helps us and helps them too but we don't get no job? She said.

IC-2: [PC1-2] said very important because if I have a job then I can take care of myself.

R: Mm, and that's kind of what both of them were saying. To follow-up with [E1] on who you work for, I'm wondering if she could talk more about why it is important and who she works for? What is that relationship like?

IE-1: [PE1] Oh, she mentioned it already. She said if she work for someone, especially if she take care of elderly people. She working for them so the elderly people cannot help themselves. But if we help them, that's why it's important

R: Oh, I see. So the kind of work? I see.

IE-1: Yeah. So she helping the community to be dependent on her.

R: I see. Okay, so another question I have for everyone. Are there any specific aspects of the job itself that are really important to you? This could be like time commitments, nature of the job itself, benefits, or where it's located. I guess I'm kind of getting at the technical parts of the job. What are those things that are most important to you when you're working or looking for work?

IE-1: [PE1] She say any job is good for us because it helps us. So, maybe they don't have a job right now so kind of like... where's the job?

R: Yeah.

IC-2: [PC2] According to me, I don't have any choice. Any job I can find, I can do it but I also have my preference like I like to do cosmetology but any job that can provide, I can do it.

R: Okay, thank you. I'll go on to the second question then. What are some concerns that you have with your own current working situation or with finding a job?

IC-2: [PC-2] So according to her, the difficult part for me for getting a job is that I don't have a job any driver licenses and language is a big barrier for me. Any job, I'll do but we don't understand the language but also child care issue. And it's for both of them **[PC-1]**.

IE-1: [PE1-2] It's kind of hard to find exactly what kind of job we need because the area we live, location and sometimes they may offer you the job but it's not much and it's not where they wanted to work because they have children and it's hard to take care of the children because of the time they offer them. It's not convenient for them at all.

R: So like time schedules are tough?

IE-1: Yeah, time schedules.

R: Okay. So the next question that I want to ask is are there any specific long term concerns with work or working and if you do, could you share about it?

IC-2: [PC1] So, working for long time for me is a bit difficult for me because I would like to maybe make money and have my own company. Have my own work according to my own schedule and help me take care of many things.

IE-1: [PE1-2] They want a reliable job and a secure job. Pay good, pay enough for the work they do and not part time job, full-time job. With insurance included.

IC-2: [PC-2] She say for her, she's going to work because get out and going depending to some schedule is always hard so the better way it would be how to pay would be to make our own company, own businesses.

R: So, they both mentioned that time schedule is a bit difficult when they're looking and trying to get a job. I am wondering is that because of travel issues or because jobs are a bit farther away from where they live?

IC-2: It is not because jobs are too far it is because back home they used to work on the same schedule and the same hour. Then here as a woman it is really hard and working so long is and not on the same schedule is hard.

R: So, they [PC1-2] said it is a bit tough as a woman, I'm wondering if they're comfortable if they could speak more on that. Is it specifically tough because of child care or?

IC-2: [PC-1] For her, you know I have to take time to take a break for myself if I work for so long then I will be tired and the same thing we would never have time to talk to our child if we are working. We will never have time to see our family and so the better way to have time to stay with kids and have family. It would be to have our own schedule and spend time with family.

And also, we are a human body and body also request, we will need to do our thing for our self.

R: So the next question is what resources and services would be most useful for their current work situation or for finding a job? This could be a service or resource that they have or don't already have.

IE-1: [PE1-2] They say, there are some resources out there which they look for you a job, so we don't know how to get to them. Is there any way to find those people who find you a job? Easier for them to get a job through a company like that. I know there are some resources out there and they look for you a job and request you for the job. That kind of company would be helpful for us, quick job. They try to do for themselves and they try and call them, and they never call them back.

IC-2: [PC1-2] According to both of them, they go to the agency but barrier is the language. Some of the agency call them and do an interview over the phone and they cannot really understand them. So English barrier is a really big thing. For her, she has a child and she has no body to take care of child, child care. Even if they have child care, DSHS provide childcare but the time they give them a job it doesn't match with the child care schedule. So the shift is really hard. Sometimes they give a job starting early in the morning but the day care start late.

Sometimes they offer a job start late and she cannot pick up her child. So child care is a really big thing for her and she also does not have anyone here to support her.

R: So they all mentioned that child care and time schedule is really difficult. What would an ideal schedule look like? Like an example, like for working and child care. What times would work for both child care and work?

Then a follow-up for them. **[PE1-2]** So they said they tried to look for a job by themselves and they had a hard time so they went to an agency and the agency doesn't respond or they're not helpful. So my follow-up questions is when they were searching by themselves, what were some difficulties that they experienced when they were trying to secure or looking for a job?

IE-1: They say most of the time when they apply for the job and they just keep telling them they'll call you but they don't call us back.

IC-2: [PC-1] For her she like to work early in the morning when the kids go to school then she can go to work then come back early before the kids come back so she can welcome the kids and then take care of them. For all of them same thing. **[PC1-3]** They would like a job that starts around 9 or 9:30, so they have time to drop off the child at the childcare like at 8 time for them they can take the bus and if they can finish early like at 5 then it would be helpful because it is always hard to get this kind of shift.

R: Okay, so questions number 4 is are there any specific kinds of work or fields of work that you're interested in working in? Any specific kind of field that they're interested in working in?

IE-1: [PE1-2] They say, we don't have any choice. We need to work anything because we lack of job, so we take any kind of job. They prefer like job training kind.

R: So like job training or developing a career. What kind of career would they be interested in pursuing?

IC-2: [PC1] So she was nurse back home and would like to go back to school and work and get back to work as a nurse. **[PC2]** She would like to work at the store because she used to work she used to have her own store and she would also like to work at the salon. Two things she like, salon and store. **[PC3]** Also for her, she would like to become a CNA or nurse also.

IE-1: [E1-2] They say no matter for job training, any kind of job that give us any kind of work right away after training ends. We will take it.

R: I can start with the last question. As they know we're exploring the idea of economic self-sufficiency to measure well-being. Are there any other things I should know or questions I should have asked?

IC-2: [PC3] She also would like to add. She say she would want to become a nurse but any training can help her to get a job and training to help her go back to get a certificate to get a nurse assistant and later become a nurse.

R: And then I'm wondering can we ask her the first two questions, since she came in late then the last two? What is most important to her when she thinks about work and working? And what are some concerns she has about work?

IE-1: [PE1-2] They say, it would be better if we have job but since we don't have that, we don't have any other situation what we asked previously.

IC-2: [PC3] When I'm thinking job, I'm thinking about make money and then later become project management. Like have my own project and then start with the project. When I think about job, I think about money and then be able to do my project. When we talk about job, we say we really like job and if I like job then I go every day then I make money and do my project. Then the second question?

R: What concerns do they have with having a job?

IC-2: [PC3] She said child care and difficult time.

R: Then the last question I have, as they know we are exploring the idea of economic self-sufficiency to measure well-being. Is there anything that I should know or questions that I should have asked?

To follow-up about work that's meaningful to the community. I'm wondering if she could explain more about why it's meaningful to her and what does meaningful work to the community look like. Is it because they know they're helping others? Is that what she was saying?

IC-2: [PC2] She say if the program can help putting in place some schedule for people who have kids, it would be helpful for us to work late and for a long time. Sometime we cannot make it because we don't have appropriate schedule and it is hard for us.

IE-1: [PE2] Working for the community, especially home care kind. We helping them more than they are helping us because we giving them life and time of their parents especially. Their parents work they cannot stop the job they working and help their family. So they need us to

work for them that way we support them more than they pay us. Especially if they need to take the medicine, we give them their medicine or anything else that needs to be done. More advantage for them than for us, even though we help them work for them we don't get paid enough. We understand, we just doing it for the job.

IC-2: [PC1-2] So both of them schedule, you guys making the program, they would like raise some concerns to this program. Would you please include time, is there any way you could put in place a schedule that start at 9 or 8 or maybe 8-5 or onto other job because all other job start early or late so it's really hard for us to do that.

[PC3] You know since they come here it's really difficult, I have one child and then I don't have anybody to support me. The thing I'm going to suggest about time is what other people say. I give my own example, I have 5-7 job but I can't get there because child care is an issue for me so I have to take a job and go back to take care of my children. No way I can have someone take care of my kid for me when I'm working so the job side is really a problem for us.

R: So I think that was it. We are wrapping up now. So just one last time, we asked them is there anything else I should know or should have asked?

IC-2: [PC3] For her, another issue would be. I want to work, if I get a part time job its ok. The welfare office support me in child care. I'm a single mom but if I want to get a full time job then the welfare office will cut off my childcare and as an immigrant here I have to pay child care so I will stay home without job then go back to the assistance. This is a big thing for us. So how can I be self sufficient if I have to work and have money and I have to work for childcare.

We want to find a job because here in this country if you don't work it is hard to take care of your family. We really want to work and take care of our family.

I had a job, when I had a job, I'm a single mom first. You want to work to become self sufficient and then when I started working the first thing the child care wanted me to pay more money. So I cannot have savings in my account and besides us we have family back home we have some time to support because we have parent back home. We don't have any savings we don't have any money to become self sufficiency.

I have children I need to save money for my children but when I have a job I need to spend all expenses go out because nothing you can save, so what can you do?

R: Oh, did we ask her what services and resources would be most useful?

IC-2: [PC3] I don't know, maybe you guys can help me. I don't know, anything I want to do. I want to work.

R: I think that concludes our focus group then. Thank you all for coming out, I appreciate it. I'm going to stop the recording right now.