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Karen Burmese Refugee Youth and Facebook: The Influence on Sense of Community and Belonging

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Introduction

- 42.5 million individuals began 2012 as displaced persons with 15.2 million as refugees.
- One refugee group is the Karen Burmese. 22170 Burmese reside in Australia as of June 2010, with 80% identifying as Karen.
- Involuntary migration is a difficult process. Some challenges experienced during resettlement are:
  - language barriers
  - loss of contact with family
  - an unreceptive host community
  - loss of social support
- Refugee youth face additional challenges such as:
  - arriving in a new country alone
  - navigating a new school system
  - having to communicate and translate for their parents

Introduction Continued

- Possessing a sense of community (SOC) and belonging (SOB) is important for everyone's psychosocial wellbeing, but this experience may be disrupted for refugee youth.

- SOC involves membership (belonging), influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. It is important for refugees to feel connected to their new community and to maintain connections with friends and family they have left behind.

- One way that young people connect is through the internet and social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook.

- Facebook has over 950 million users and offers many different functions that facilitate sharing and connecting with others.

- A sense of virtual community (SOVC) is said to incorporate membership, influence, and immersion. Only research into how immigrant youth use SNS has been conducted and found that it was a source of socialisation and communication with new peers, fellow immigrants, and people back home; it was also a source of information about their homeland.

- The current study utilised a phenomenological approach to explore the following question:

"How do Karen Burmese young people from refugee backgrounds use SNS and how does this influence their SOC/SOB?"

Approach

Methodology

- An interpretative phenomenological approach was taken with the SOC/SOB framework used to guide the data collection and analysis
- The researcher maintained a journal throughout the research process to improve self-awareness of the research experience.

Informants

- Criterion sampling was used
- Recently resettled Karen Burmese youth ($N = 11$)
- Males ($N = 6$) and Females ($N = 5$) and aged 15 – 21 years

Procedure

- SOC/SOB concepts informed the focus group discussion plan
- Participants were recruited from the Karen Baptist Church Youth Group
- Two focus groups were conducted during a regular Youth Group Meeting (the researcher and supervisor met with potential participants the week before to establish rapport)
- The focus groups ran for 40 minutes (female group) and 80 minutes (male group). They were audio-recorded and the supervisor took notes

Approach Continued

Data Analysis Process

- Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilised (with adjustments made to incorporate the use of Nvivo 9)

- The audio recordings were transcribed

- Annotations were made on Transcript A

- Significant statements were entered into emerging themes using Nvivo9

- Emerging themes were examined for connections, with clusters being created with themes and sub-themes.

- This process was repeated several times to refine and re-organise the themes as new information was identified *(ongoing)*

- The list of themes and sub-themes was then used to guide the analysis of Transcript B but new themes are welcome to emerge as this is part of recognising the convergence and divergence of the different sources *(This is the current stage)*

Findings

Preliminary analysis has indicated several themes and sub-themes. The themes are currently undergoing refinement and the organisation may change. The current themes are as follows:

Theme	Sub-themes						
Connecting	Interactions	Barriers to Interaction	Frequency of Use	Method of Use	Membership	Treatment by others	Offline Overlap
Facebook Functions	Facebook Groups		Communication Functions		Playing Games		Posting Videos
Reasons for Using Facebook	Importance of Facebook in Life				Life Without Facebook		
Facebook Concerns	Privacy				Dislikes about Facebook		
General Internet Use	Access				Information Seeking		
Youth Group and Facebook							

Examples of Themes

Life without Facebook sub-theme:

Researcher: ... if you didn't have Facebook?

Female A = lonely, lonely and hard

Female B: lost contact

Female D: it would be hard

...

A = you wouldn't know what is going on

C = I would be so bored!

B = you would be like dead!

D = no communication

Examples of Themes

Privacy sub-theme:

Female D: like [talking about a] serious problem, sometimes I don't like, if you don't have someone to contact it can be scary, but Facebook can be hacked and then they can see all the serious conversations and they can know everything, that is one thing that is bad…

…

Female D = like I got hacked so I um pretty scary and there is this guy and he keep on talking to me and um like I unfriended him the first time but then he keep adding me and he changed his name too, stuff like that. And then he added me again, that scares me about Facebook.

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