

Asset-based community development approaches to resilience among refugees and recent migrant communities in Australia: a scoping review

Hannah Lester, Yana Ryakhovskaya and Titus S. Olorunnisola

Abstract

Purpose – Resilience is an increasingly important concept that contributes to sustainability and wellbeing of a community. Asset-based community development (ABCD) may offer promising approaches to boosting community resilience in Australia, especially within marginalised groups.

Design/methodology/approach – A scoping review was conducted to conceptualise existing literature on ABCD approaches to building resilience. Research databases were searched with relevant details.

Findings – Thirty-three sources were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria and were reviewed in terms of six themes: integration and identity, health, mental health, education, employment and community planning. Issues identified by the literature within these themes can be alleviated through asset-based approaches. Implications for planning of asset-based programs and policy change are discussed in light of the findings.

Practical implications – The results of this study provide several implications for practise, policy recommendations and future research into this area. Results suggest that increasing capacity around asset-based coping mechanisms, such as support networks through religious and cultural groups, would promote community development and foster resilience. Furthermore, policy on refugees in multiple areas, such as psychological service provision and employment, should be redesigned in a way that acknowledges their complex and diverse needs and facilitates their integration into the community. Though multiple ways to achieve this goal have been explored in literature, a sustained and broader approach is necessary to see widespread change. Further research and funding are required to explore and implement appropriate responses. Based on the findings and discussion above, the authors make the following policy recommendations. Service providers need to be aware of and incorporate culturally appropriate programs in the areas of mental health assessment and intervention, education and employment. The trauma-informed approach should be used when dealing with refugee groups and other groups who have faced hardships. Government policy should focus on improving community engagement to create and strengthen social networks, which are vital in boosting integration into the community and increasing health education and access to services. Government should focus on asset-based approaches in designing education and employment integration programs to promote social belonging and community engagement, and thus, community resilience, which will consequently have beneficial individual and group outcomes. The current governmental policy surrounding refugees should be overhauled with the goal of successful refugee integration in mind, such as incorporating the ability for refugees to access vital services such as employment and skills transferability programs. Due to current policy, these services are inaccessible to a large portion of refugees, hindering their integration. Government needs to create specific guidelines for the provision of psychological services to refugees to improve the quality of mental health services available to this group.

Originality/value – This paper comprises an original data analysis of the relevant existing literature by the project team. The process was rigorous, and no content of the analysis has been published

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Erratum: It has come to the attention of the publisher that the article, Lester, H., Ryakhovskaya, Y. and Olorunnisola, T.S. (2023), "Asset-based community development approaches to resilience among refugees and recent migrant communities in Australia: a scoping review", *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMHS-09-2022-0098>, omitted the following references from the Reference list: Chenoweth & Stehlik (2001), Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2008), Gibson *et al.*, (2020), Micah *et al.*, (2021), and Wilson (2012). This error was introduced in the typesetting process and has now been corrected in the online version. The publisher sincerely apologises for this error and for any inconvenience caused.

Author contribution statement: HL and YR contributed to this project equally including database search, screening, quality appraisal, review and manuscript writing. TSO conceived the topical focus, reviewed the manuscript and supervised the project.

previously except the material published by other authors. All previously published materials were duly acknowledged.

Keywords *Community resilience, Asset-based community development, Refugee health, Refugee resettlement*

Paper type *Literature review*

Executive summary

This paper details and discusses the findings of a scoping review conducted to examine the amount, types and focus of the conceptual and empirical literature on the asset-based community development (ABCD) approaches to development in Australia.

ABCD may offer promising approaches to boosting community resilience in Australia, especially within marginalised groups. This is important, as resilience is increasingly identified as a key contributor to sustainability and wellbeing of a community.

This scoping review was conducted to conceptualise existing literature on ABCD approaches to building resilience using standard Arksey and O'Malley scoping reviews methodological framework. Findings were summarised thematically with emerging themes synthesised and presented through inductive process.

The main findings of the review are as follows:

- The themes identified after synthesis were as follows: integration and identity, health, mental health, education, employment and community planning.
- There were some intersections among the emerging themes with many of them focusing on the experiences of refugees and migrant communities and their inclusion in the community.
- Issues identified by the literature within these themes can be lightened through asset-based approaches.
- There is a current gap in adequate programs and strategies to boost successful integration with formal education, both in school-age and adult groups among marginalised groups.
- Overall, we found that there is less emphasis on asset-based approaches to community development in Australia and a greater effort for quantitative investigation is needed.

Introduction

Resilience is a prominent concept in contemporary social studies, denoting the capacity to overcome challenges. Community resilience ensures community sustainability and integrity. [Marshall et al. \(2009, p. 904\)](#) identifies resilience as an “important concept that is emerging to guide and support more inclusive approaches to the management of combined social and ecological systems.”

Asset-based approaches have been commonly used within the social studies discipline to harness the strengths and capacities of individuals and communities in a positive way, often as solutions to pertinent issues. This approach allows capacities to be harnessed to their full potential. The approach is commonly applied to community resilience studies, as well as practical contexts such as policy-making, community development and social work. Asset-based approaches can facilitate change, specifically by aiming to bolster community resilience through a positive focus on strengths over weaknesses. Orientated towards sustainable community growth, changes typically come from within a community, building upon capacities and assets which already exist ([Ennis and West, 2010](#)). Asset-based approaches, therefore, have a focus on strengthening existing social networks to mobilise change ([Ennis and West, 2010](#)).

A scoping review is often used to understand the nature of evidence over a given topic and to map the available literature. The aim of this scoping review is to

investigate the nature, amount and types of the existing literature on asset-based approaches to community resilience in Australia. There has been limited research into the use of asset-based approaches to promote community resilience, especially within the Australian context. Findings reveal an almost exclusive focus on refugee and migrant groups, as reflected in this paper. Our analysis seeks to extrapolate these findings to consider the experiences of other social groups, such as young people and regional communities.

Method

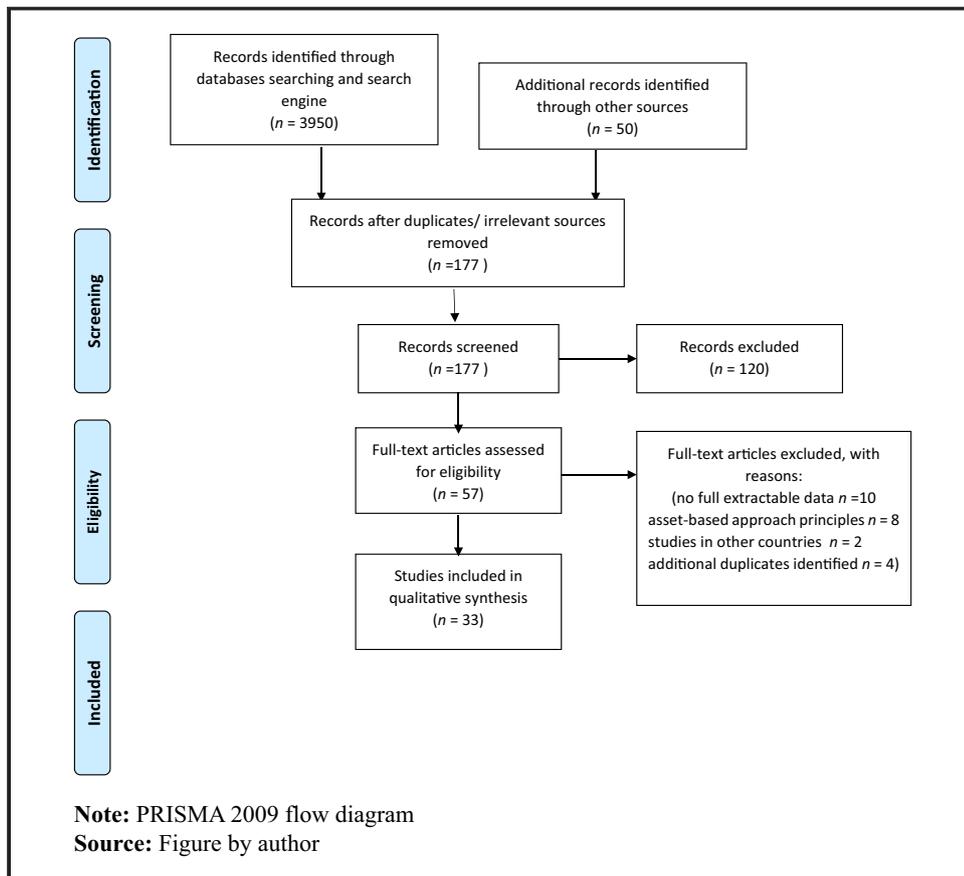
Protocol

We developed our search protocol using the scoping review methodological framework proposed by [Arksey and O'Malley \(2005\)](#), and we refined it with the Joanna Briggs Institute guide ([Micah et al., 2021](#)). The draft protocol was revised by the lead researcher (TSO) to ensure accuracy and consistency with the standard scoping review protocol. The following methodology is summarised in [Figure 1](#).

Search strategy

The research process for this project began in late 2020. The first step of the process was source identification. The search strategy aimed at identifying both published and grey literature on an asset-based approach to community development. This involved entering a combination

Figure 1 Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) flow chart



of relevant key terms, including “asset-based community approach”, “community development”, “community resilience” and “community development” into Google search engine. We also searched Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science and the University of Queensland library database. These key phrases are located in a vast range of over 4,000 sources in total, including books and journal articles. From the sources presented, those with direct relevance to the research topic were collected in a tabular format. A total of 177 sources were collected.

Level 1 screening

Level 1 screening involved screening titles and source abstracts of the identified sources. All the collected studies were screened against our inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria allowed irrelevant sources to be discarded in a non-biased format.

Inclusion criteria

Our inclusion criteria specified that studies must be:

- written in English;
- relevant to the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach at face value;
- involved the collection of data or review centred around collected data; and
- published in Australia or containing an Australian sample.

From the 177 sources collected, 33 met the inclusion criteria. The process of Level 1 screening was completed by YR and HL, each screening half of the sources ([Figure 1](#)).

Level 2 screening

YR and HL screened the sources independently and thereafter swapped the studies to ensure credibility. As part of Level 2 screening, quality appraisals of each of the sources were completed. To complete the quality appraisal process, the researchers used [Hong et al.'s \(2018\)](#) mixed methods appraisal tool (MMAT). This appraisal tool was chosen as the literature found used a range of different methodologies. MMAT works by categorising sources as qualitative, qualitative randomised controlled trials, quantitative non-randomised, quantitative descriptive or mixed methods. After categorising sources appropriately, each source was screened against corresponding questions outlined by the MMAT. From the answers to these questions, each source was given a percentage, reflecting the quality of the source. Sources were found to be of adequate quality; thus, none were excluded on the basis of quality.

Charting process

Subsequent to the quality appraisal process, a thematic analysis was completed as part of the charting process. This involved reviewing each source for keywords and themes. This allowed for the sources to be compiled into categories. These categories initially included contextual/background, education, general health, identity and integration, mental health, tourism, infrastructure and planning and sport.

Further charting was then conducted in a tabular format. This allowed the researchers to thoroughly review each source to note comments and implications and track results derived from sources. From this information, conclusions and opportunities for further research were recognised. Throughout the research process for this project, weekly check-ins were completed to ensure the project ran smoothly and progressed appropriately. This assisted in evaluating the procedures which were being followed by the researchers to ensure consistency and credibility across the sources used.

Results

Thirty-three studies met the inclusion criteria as the final number of included studies in this review. The year of publication of selected studies ranged from 2001 to 2020. Twenty studies were based on qualitative data, including interviews and focus group discussions. Out of these, there were seven case studies. No studies relied solely on quantitative data; instead, there were six studies that used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Six of the sources were reviews, including systematic reviews. Two of the sources were not able to be categorised as using a particular method (e.g. Chenoweth and Stehlik, 2001 is a discussion drawing conclusions from multiple previous studies conducted by the authors). Many of the relevant literature found has specifically focused on certain marginalised groups in Australian society. Figure 2 represents the frequency of the asset-based themes (in %) in the included literature. It should be noted that some sources have covered multiple themes in this review.

In particular, we note an overwhelming focus on refugees, their experiences, issues, needs and programs targeting successful integration. There has been a paucity of literature found explicitly linking asset-based community approaches with resilience. Nevertheless, based on our analysis, six main themes have emerged as being central to this topic; integration and identity, health, mental health, education, employment and community planning. Table 1 provides the list of the included studies and the key themes that they address.

The findings within the first five themes are closely interlinked with one another and are especially reciprocal to the theme of integration and identity. The last theme, community planning, was initially made up of three identified themes; tourism, infrastructure/planning and sport. However, there was not a sufficient number of sources for each of these themes and thus had to be synthesised into an overarching theme. This theme consequently encapsulates multiple perspectives and asset-based “solutions” to the issues raised in the first five themes.

Integration and identity

A total of eleven studies are included within the theme of integration and identity. These sources demonstrated that individual and collective identity significantly impacts community

Figure 2 Frequency and relative proportion of asset-based themes found in the literature

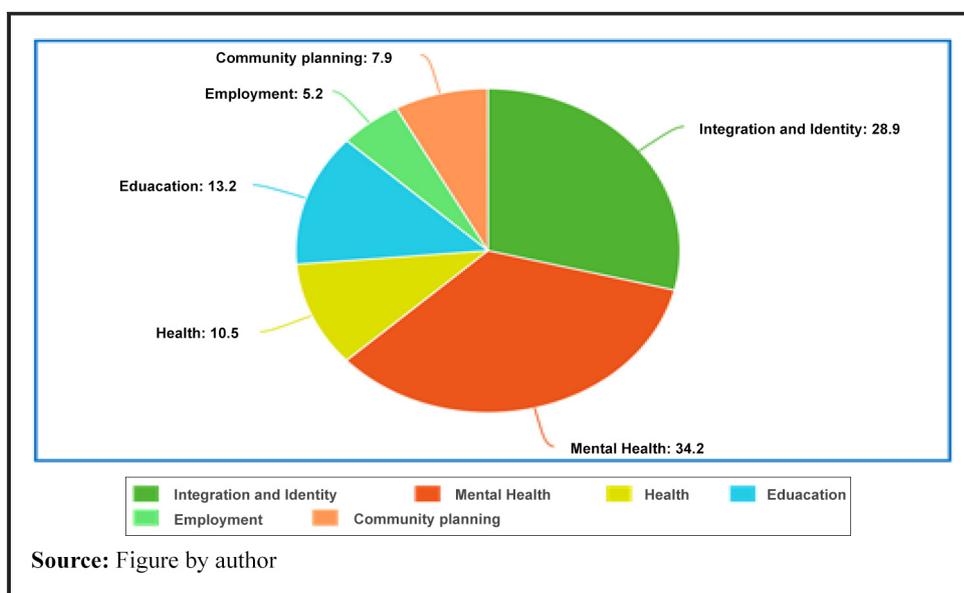


Table 1 Included studies and their conclusions/recommendations of ABCD approaches/barriers to community resilience

S/N	Author and publication year	Article title	Recommendations/Conclusions	Key asset-based themes/ findings	Research method
1.	Almohamed and Vyas (2016)	Vulnerability and displacement: challenges for integrating refugees and Asylum seekers in host communities	Asylum seekers have common goals regarding integration into community. Thus, focus should be placed on allowing refugees/asylum seekers to expand their social networks to build trust	Mistrust, cultural barriers, displacement trauma, <i>integration and identity</i>	Semi-structured interviews
2.	Bottrell (2007)	Resistance Resilience and Social Identities: reframing "problem youth" and the problem of schooling	When marginalised youth reject mainstream options (as limiting to them) they opt for more rewarding environment and their 'resistance' is seen as barriers to conventional success – but this is resilience in that they are agentic and claim affiliation on their terms and values	Marginalised youth, <i>identity and integration, school, community, resilience, resistance</i>	Participant observation, semi-structured interviews
3.	Boyd et al. (2008)	Harnessing the social capital of rural communities for youth mental health: An asset-based community development framework	Collective approaches to youth mental health in rural settings should be considered above individualistic approaches. Success of government initiatives targeting rural youth mental health depends on willingness to adopt ABCD strategies	Rural communities, <i>mental health, asset-based community development, social capital</i>	Case study
4.	Cameron et al. (2011)	Young refugees in Australia: Perspectives from policy, practise and research	Young refugees often experience traumatic events with increased prevalence of mental health issues. There's a need for more qualitative research to assess effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs. The needs of young refugees need to be considered from a risk and protection framework that values their resilience	Youth refugee experience and <i>mental health, policy</i>	Literature review
5.	Cheng et al. (2015)	Importance of community engagement in primary health care: the case of Afghan refugees	Improved community engagement is a vital strategy to improve health education. Health services should strive to be more responsive to cultural and linguistic differences	Community participation, Afghan refugees/migrants, <i>health</i>	Systematic review
6.	Chenoweth and Stehlik (2001)	Building resilient communities: Social work practise and rural Queensland	Social work can have substantial impact on resilience of rural communities	<i>Employment</i>	Discussion paper based on multiple studies conducted by authors
7.	Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008)	Being black in Australia: a case study of intergroup relations	Attrn limit opportunities in rural areas – new grads reluctant to work in rural areas. Need to develop schemes to recruit and support social workers	Indigenous Australians, African refugees, class and racial relations, <i>integration and identity</i>	Case study
8.	Coronado (2003)	Crossing borders and transforming identities: encountering diasporic Mexicanness in Australia	(Indigenous Australians and refugees) compete for scarce resources such as welfare support Sharing meanings as part of diasporic community makes settlement easier – increases belonging but risks non-belonging to the wider community	Diasporic community/ immigration, <i>integration and identity</i>	Self-reflective and self-ethnographic discussion paper

(continued)

Table 1

S/N	Author and publication year	Article title	Recommendations/Conclusions	Key asset-based themes/ findings	Research method
9.	Davidson et al. (2008)	Review of refugee mental health and wellbeing: Australian perspectives	Better guidelines should be developed to promote access and equity for MH services and should be based on identified issues. Psychologists should be aware of the requirement to work under conditions that reduce effectiveness of mental health interventions (i.e. mandatory detention)	Refugee, mental health, mandatory detention, provision of psychological services	Literature review
10.	Dowling et al. (2020)	The impact of migration upon the perceived health of adult refugees resettling in Australia: a phenomenological study	The health of participants is influenced by pre-migration violence and loss, and stressors associated with living in transit and settlement countries. Social support, religiosity and future aspirations were commonly reported enablers of health and well-being	Refugees, migration, physical, integration and identity, health, employment	Semi-structured interviews
11.	Ferfolja and Vickers (2010)	Supporting refugee students in school education in Greater Western Sydney	Consistent difference in improvement between consistent attendees and sporadic attendees = RAS tutoring has influence on student outcomes. Students' transitions can be more successful if they have access to intensive one on one tutoring	Refugee youth, education	Semi-structured interviews
12.	Fleay et al. (2013)	Refugees and asylum seekers living in the Australian community: the importance of work rights and employment support	Right to work and ability to secure employment were major challenges faced by most men interviewed. Insecurity and negative impact on mental health due to uncertainty of outcome on protection claims – not having right to work exacerbates it despite living outside closed detention	Refugees, asylum seekers, employment, mental health, mandatory detention,	Semi-structured interviews
13.	Fozdar and Torezani (2008)	Discrimination and Wellbeing: Perceptions of Refugees in Western Australia	Refugees perceive a relationship between wellbeing and discrimination. Some factors could protect wellbeing – personality, social support, religion, intelligence, relative comparisons – could be that the sample had these features so they experienced or discrimination could be seen as a small price to pay for living in a safe place and other factors are more important for determining wellbeing	Discrimination, wellbeing, employment, refugees, mental health	Semi-structured interviews and Questionnaires
14.	Gibson et al. (2020)	Sharing and valuing older Aboriginal people's voices about social and emotional wellbeing services: a strength based approach for service providers	Many services unable to deliver culturally responsive services. Strength based approach developed includes listening respectfully to the person, building relationships, using appropriate communication skills, critically reflect on Australia's political, historical and social context and applying human rights based approach	Social and emotional wellbeing, older people, indigenous Australians, mental health	Yarning (Culturally appropriate interviews)
15.	Stephens et al. (2013)	Australian Indigenous community development: making the link between community development training and community development practice	The implications of education and training as an intervention strategy for effective community development practice need further exploration. There is scope to explore the outcomes of the intersection between the three elements of empowerment, adult education, and social capital, and the potential for them to reinforce each other	Indigenous Australians, adult Education, community development, strength based approach	Case Study

(continued)

Table 1

S/N	Author and publication year	Article title	Recommendations/Conclusions	Key asset-based themes/ findings	Research method
16.	Steel et al. (2002)	Long-term effect of psychological trauma on the mental health of Vietnamese refugees resettled in Australia: a population-based study	After 14 years since exposure to the most distressing traumatic event (index trauma), a significant association persisted between trauma exposure and risk of mental illness, whether defined by western or culturally appropriate criteria	Refugees, trauma, mental health, disability	Semi-structured interviews and Questionnaires
17.	Schweitzer et al. (2007)	Coping and resilience in refugees from the Sudan: a narrative account	Themes directly related to resilience may be translated into strategies to assist in responding constructively to trauma. Such approaches may be used to improve the wellbeing of resettled refugees in Australia	Refugees, resettlement, resilience (coping), mental health, integration and identity	Unstructured Interviews
18.	Smith et al. (2020)	Factors Shaping the Lived Experience of Resettlement for Former Refugees in Regional Australia	Resettlement services for refugees resettled in regional areas including accessible English programs, trauma-informed counselling, and better enforcement of policies designed to preclude the use of children as interpreters need to be strengthened	Refugees, housing, resettlement, mental health	Focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews
19.	Fuller et al. (2005)	Ecotourism and indigenous micro enterprise formation in northern Australia opportunities and constraints	Key success/failure factors in Indigenous tourism business includes access to funds – lower income and asset levels, lack of familiarity of financial institutions, inability to prepare formal business and financial plans – Community development employment projects may potentially be helpful for this	Indigenous-owned business, ecotourism, boat transport, community planning	Case study
20.	Nemorin et al. (2019)	Community partnership with Rohingya refugees in Sydney, Australia: a systemic approach towards healing and recovery	Federal government scheme is key in promoting Indigenous owned and operated business but administration of program negates opportunities offered	Refugees, asset-based approach, trauma, biopsychosocial, integration and identity	Literature Review
21.	Westoby (2008)	Developing a community-development approach through engaging resettling Southern Sudanese refugees within Australia	Promotion of the existing resilience and perseverance of the Rohingya refugees, advocacy which includes refugee representatives and participation, refugee policy debate and in service provision rather than relying on their own expertise would be beneficial and constructive for building a stronger community that enable healing for refugees and the provision of legal rights	Community development, social work, refugees, resettlement, integration and identity	Participant observation and unstructured interviews

(continued)

Table 1

S/N	Author and publication year	Article title	Recommendations/Conclusions	Key asset-based themes/ findings	Research method
22.	Mardiros (2001)	Reconnecting Communities Through Community-based Action Research	Community-based action research can assist traumatised people If research is to positively change the lives of Aboriginal peoples, community involvement in that research becomes a moral imperative for researchers and practitioners alike	Indigenous Australians, health, community based project	Case study
23.	Misener and Schulenkorf (2016)	Rethinking the Social Value of Sport Events Through an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Perspective	ABCD perspective requires a shift in the implementation and understanding of community development, the way community members are valued, and the manner by which power relations between local communities and external development agents are balanced. For true asset-based development to occur, local communities need to be the centrepiece of development activities throughout all stages of the sport and event lifecycle	Asset-based, community planning	Case study
24.	McMichael and Manderson (2004)	Somali Women and Well-Being: Social Networks and Social Capital among Immigrant Women in Australia	Social capital is neither necessarily portable nor easily established on migration. Women's understandings of contemporary social relations are given comparative meaning through their juxtaposition with memories of social networks	refugees, wellbeing, social life, mental health	In-depth interviews
25.	Momartin et al. (2018)	Resilience building through alternative intervention: STARTTS; Project Bantu Capoiseira Angola; On the road to recovery	Young, traumatised refugees have often struggle with the consequences of low resilience. With no constructive outlet or guidance, this can lead to non-adaptive behaviours. The healthy group environment taught young refugees to be resilient, providing positive examples of nurturing and functional relationships governed by mutual respect	Refugee youth, trauma, schooling, resilience, mental health, integration and identity	Semi-structured interview and questionnaires
26.	Murray et al. (2008)	Psychological wellbeing of refugees resettling in Australia: A literature review prepared for the Australian Psychological Society	Observing their own progress during intervention and attending regular groups, helped participants gain a sense of achievement and self-worth Practice guidelines adapted from existing practice guidelines and checklists for medical and nursing personnel who work with refugees, and ethical guidelines offering additional guidance for psychologists working with refugees, would assist in determining the nature and scope of such training and provide practitioners with a ready reference for use in practice settings	Refugee, mental health, wellbeing, resettlement, integration and identity	Literature Review
27.	Novacevski and Meadows (2020)	Working with reverberations: new ways for small towns	Proposes three lessons for further development of small-town planning frameworks and other strategies seeking to influence metropolitan governance and rural areas including tying land use instruments (zoning and overlay controls) to urban design and infrastructure practice; using a planning approach which embraces complexity and to seek to respect and understand lived experiences of small towns	Rural, community planning, community development,	Case Study

(continued)

Table 1

S/N	Author and publication year	Article title	Recommendations/Conclusions	Key asset-based themes/ findings	Research method
28.	Wong et al. (2020)	Living a Healthy Life in Australia: Exploring Influences on Health for Refugees from Myanmar	The relationship between health and social, economic and environmental factors is well established. Service providers should work collaboratively to address factors impacting health of refugees and recognise the strengths that people from refugee backgrounds possess and work closely with individuals and or the community to support them in developing strategies and interventions tailored to them. The accumulative nature of resilience contributes to the refugee's ability to settle effectively in Australia. Resilience is a key component of education capabilities	Refugees, health, strength-based approach, wellbeing	Questionnaires and focus group discussion
29.	Wilson (2012)	Accumulating resilience: an investigation of the migration and resettlement experiences of young Sudanese people in the Western Sydney area		Resilience, refugees, Education, resettlement	Unstructured Interviews
30.	Humpage and Marston (2005)	Cultural justice, community development and onshore refugees in Australia	Need to conceptualise community development to highlight connections between redistribution and recognition. More expansive and encompassing approach needed that recognises cultural and material dimensions of injustice. Community development should involve revaluing identities, policy making participation, service planning, meeting welfare needs of refugees	Refugees, temporary protection visa, community development, resettlement, integration and identity	Interviews and focus groups
31.	Lawlis et al. (2018)	Achieving the four dimensions of food security for resettled refugees in Australia: a systematic review	Food insecurity has adverse impacts on refugee health and integration. Methodological research is important to address challenges to securing food in refugee groups and assisting development of interventions	Food insecurity, refugees, wellbeing, health	Systematic Review
32.	Watkins and Noble (2008)	Cultural practices and learning: Diversity, discipline and dispositions in schooling	Dispositions to learn need to be understood in terms of particular kinds of practices, rather than explained by "ethnicity" per se. The home and school experiences of these students are, therefore, examined to enhance our understanding of effective educational practices	Education	Multi study report utilising mixed methods
33.	Ziatan et al. (2018)	Refugee students' psychological wellbeing and experiences in the Australian education system: A mixed-methods investigation	Interconnection between schooling experiences of young refugees and their mental health. Further research avenues include developing and evaluating more holistic models of education addressing education and mental health needs for refugee youth	Refugees, youth mental health, wellbeing, education	Questionnaires and focus group discussion

Note: Key themes are denoted in italic.
Source: Table by author

development approaches to resilience. Overarching distinctions of class and race underpin social groups (Bottrell, 2007), impacting individual's capacities to integrate.

Almohamed and Vyas (2016) found that refugees are one of the largest groups to experience identity and integration challenges. An unprecedented increase in refugee populations between 2001 and 2010 resulted in an increase in displacement, separation from family, an absence of social support and language barriers. This has resulted in social isolation and health problems, premising the need to enhance settlement outcomes (Nemorin *et al.*, 2019). Another study revealed that three broad themes impacted the refugee integration process (Almohamed and Vyas, 2016). These included mistrust – whereby asylum seekers are less likely to seek assistance from community services, cultural barriers – including differing religions and ways of life compared to host communities and finally, displacement trauma – impacting mental health.

A number of scholars have noted that characteristics comprising individual identity are important to facilitate integration, respond to trauma and promote identity security (Coronado, 2003; Dowling *et al.*, 2020; Schweitzer *et al.*, 2007). These individual identity characteristics include family and community support, religion, personal attitudes and beliefs and comparison with others (Coronado, 2003; Dowling *et al.*, 2020; Schweitzer *et al.*, 2007). Viewing these individual characteristics as assets allows for capacities to be harnessed and translated into more practical and universal ways to help refugees cope (Schweitzer, 2007) and, overall, build resilience.

Multiple scholars have concluded that asylum seekers tend to have common goals to do with community integration, learning English and securing employment. A study that consisted of focus group discussions with former refugees who settled in Launceston, Tasmania, revealed that there is a need for English programs, trauma-informed, culturally sensitive service provisions and better enforcement of policies aimed to prevent the use of children as interpreters (Smith *et al.*, 2020).

Moving away from the discourse surrounding refugees, young people were another social group which featured in literature. Young people are often viewed as particularly vulnerable in instances of development and building resilience. A study completed by Bottrell (2007) demonstrated that youth resistance can be reframed as resilience, allowing youth to deal with marginalisation and take control of their lives (Bottrell, 2007).

Westoby (2008) emphasises the importance of the role of social workers in using identity as a vehicle to develop community resilience. While social settings are becoming increasingly complex, literature suggests that this makes the application of community development approaches more difficult. Murray *et al.* (2008) completed a study that concluded that specialist training programs for social workers and psychologists who work with refugees is recommended to assist in guiding professionals in providing culturally sensitive services.

Coronado (2003) suggests that identity markers can be used to facilitate a sense of belonging. Identity markers refer to individual characteristics such as gender, race and religion. Though, this can have adverse impacts, confining individuals to singular social groups. Constricting individuals to singular social stereotypes is an inaccurate “policy metaphor,” resulting in discrimination throughout social landscapes (Humpage and Marston, 2005). Humpage and Marston also note that policy needs to be rethought in order for it to account for material and cultural injustices faced by refugees. Instead, cultural and individual diversity needs to be embraced rather than perpetuated to eliminate stereotyping.

Health

A total of five studies of the included sources have examined how pre- and post-migration factors have bidirectionally affected physical health in migrants and, in particular, refugees. Many have further identified various social, economic and environmental factors that have an

impact on physical health (Wong *et al.*, 2020). In particular, Dowling *et al.* (2020) identified a “catch-22 effect” between employment and health problems in male refugees wherein many of their respondents felt pressured to take up employment that often had a negative impact on their pre-existing health conditions (e.g. construction work). In turn, they often felt unable to bring up any health concerns to their employers for fear of losing employment. Lawlis *et al.* (2018) found that refugees are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, which in turn has been found to adversely impact refugee health and integration. These studies have demonstrated how issues stemming from economic disadvantage, which is often faced by disadvantaged migrant groups such as refugees, have direct impacts on physical health. Subsequently, poor physical health can have adverse effects on other areas, such as the ability to gain and maintain employment and the ability to integrate into the community.

Another strand of research has examined access to health services in relation to refugees. A review by Cheng *et al.* (2015) found differences in strategies of delivering primary health care services that adversely impacts the use of Australian health care services by refugees.

Cheng *et al.* (2015) and Wong *et al.* (2020) found that community engagement and asset-based community-led approaches are effective in boosting access to health services and, in turn, boosting the physical health of migrants and refugees’ post-settlement. Mardiros (2001) illustrated this idea by providing an excellent case study of an Indigenous community-led project to address a particular health problem (increase of alcohol-related violence and deaths).

Mental Health

A total of thirteen sources surrounding this theme have largely looked at the impact of trauma, wellbeing and mental health among refugees, with many (Davidson *et al.*, 2008) uncovering a complex interplay between pre-displacement variables such as trauma, systemic variables such as refugee services, post displacement variables such as level of English, with a range of mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Steel *et al.* (2002) found a significant association between trauma exposure and risk of mental illness in refugees. Furthermore, they found that trauma had a dose-dependent association with poor mental health and various indices of psychological dysfunction. Their study points to the long-lasting effects of trauma on mental health, which persists despite resettlement in time and location. Similarly, Smith *et al.* (2020) conducted focus group discussions with refugees from various backgrounds who have resettled in Launceston. Their findings highlight an interrelationship between trauma, distress, help-seeking behaviour and issues relating to mental health literacy.

Many of the sources reviewed have highlighted issues that the mental health system in Australia faces when dealing with refugees and have argued for the need to reassess the current system in terms of its interactions with marginalised groups in the community. Notably, Cameron and colleagues (2011) found that current mental health services do not reach everyone who needs them and that the system is ill-equipped to deal with refugee migrants due to their complex needs because of trauma and cultural diversity. Presently, no guidelines exist for the provision of psychological services to refugees, which several have argued is a major problem of the mental health system (Davidson *et al.*, 2008; Murray *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, cultural, religious and linguistic differences have an impact on how refugees cope with stress.

A different strand of research within this theme focused on protective factors related to mental health, highlighting the role of community as a key protective factor that can bolster mental wellbeing outcomes. Schweitzer *et al.* (2007) identified several themes associated with coping and resilience, highlighting the role of the family and community in helping those who have been exposed to trauma make meaning of these events. Furthermore, McMichael and Manderson (2004) found that refugee womens’ sense of anxiety and

distress depended on the strength of their social networks, seeing an increase in poor mental health in association with perceptions of lowered solidarity and support after migration. Together, these findings suggest that social support (or lack of) plays a key role in determining mental health.

Education

The theme of education has been featured in six studies. Employment and education opportunities have been reported to be highly valued by refugee respondents (Smith *et al.*, 2020), and based on some of the sources identified in the theme of mental health, this is an area that may impact wellbeing outcomes of refugees. Sources within this theme have been diverse in terms of their focus. However, these sources still provide multiple nuanced perspectives into issues surrounding education, highlighting the importance of improving education outcomes through specialised programs tailored to marginalised students.

Bottrell (2007) found that marginalised youth have reasons for resisting school, primarily through absenteeism and truancy, which for them, is a form of critique of the education system that contrasts their strong youth support network. The behaviour of this group reinforces their marginalisation by others and highlights issues with schooling for marginalised youth. Schooling has been found to put pressure on marginalised youth and often reinforces a perception of the inability to change their situation while perpetuating stereotypes such as the expectation of failure. More importantly, Bottrell (2007) has found that the social hierarchies of students mimicked the social hierarchy of that community through the students' popularity, affluence and academic success. As a result, Bottrell (2007) argued that community-based approaches in education are important as status at school is not separate from status in the community. Bottrell (2007) further notes that this youth resistance can be reframed as resilience, wherein these students are proactively dealing with marginalisation and taking control of the negative image imposed by others in their community.

Others have focused on refugee and migrant experiences within the schooling system. Ziaian *et al.* (2018) found that resettlement increases family responsibilities and expectations that can adversely impact emotional wellbeing and academic achievement of refugee students. Notably, they have found significant gender differences in experiences in terms of demands and expectations. Watkins and Noble (2008), in a range of studies, found that Chinese, Pacific Islander (including Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islander, Maori, Fijian or Tokelauan) and Anglo-Australian students have different approaches to their education, leading to significant differential outcomes between the three groups. They found a link between home education practices and school practices that differentially influenced the students' disposition towards learning. They also found that these groups of students responded differently to different teaching methods. The authors concluded that rather than seeing different patterns of achievement among different groups of students as "natural" or a result of their ethnicity, they should instead be attributed to home and school education practices, the habits of which the school and classrooms can be influential in shaping.

Ferfolja and Vickers (2010) evaluated preparatory programs designed to assimilate refugee students within the Australian education system, finding that the transition of refugee students can be more successful and achieve better educational outcomes if students have access to intensive one on one tutoring over a period of time. They concluded that the processes of the Australian education system are not transparent and are unclear to refugee students; therefore, targeted and tailored preparatory programs are needed to aid their integration into mainstream Australian education.

Employment

Two of the included studies discussed employment opportunities as a highly valued element of refugees' life that may aid their assets in the community. This theme encapsulates research that identified employment as being a pertinent issue in regards to bolstering resilience within marginalised groups. Employment has been identified as a potential issue which in some cases negatively impacts physical health, and at the same time being a protective factor to mental health, which can be a key to successful integration within the community (Dowling *et al.*, 2020). Fleay and colleagues (2013) have found that the right to work and the ability to secure employment was one of the major challenges faced by most refugees they interviewed. Not having the right to work for refugees who are living outside of closed detention and have an "in-between" visa status has especially exacerbated the resulting negative impact on mental health due to the uncertainty of their situation. However, suitable employment can help restore self-worth and mental health after being negatively impacted (Fleay *et al.*, 2013).

Fleay and colleagues (2013) have also identified barriers to finding suitable employment, including legal policy and language barriers, finding that many refugees, due to their legal status, were not entitled to formal support to secure employment and had limited access to English language tuition which further added difficulties for them in gaining employment.

Community planning

A total of three of the included studies discussed community planning. This theme encapsulates potential initiatives that can be developed as solutions to some of the issues raised in the above themes. Initiatives targeting tourism development could be a solution to boosting employment and community connectedness whilst promoting and celebrating the culture and values of that community.

Fuller *et al.* (2005) identified key factors in success of an Indigenous-led tourism business. They provide a case study demonstrating the importance of adequate business planning within an asset-based framework that acknowledges the importance of culture. They found that an Indigenous-owned small business has the potential to be established with economic viability, which can provide economic and social benefits for owners-operators, employees and the wider community. This in turn can lead to further community-led project development and help sustain culture and the environment within that community. At the same time, Fuller and colleagues have identified some potential problems that these businesses face, including issues in securing funds due to inadequate asset levels, lack of familiarity of financial institutions and formal business plan procedures. To counter this, the authors recommend that federal government schemes designed to support community development employment projects could help promote community-owned and operated business.

Novacevski and Meadows (2020) provide a holistic approach to infrastructure planning that acknowledges the importance of place. They argue that place intersects wellbeing, resilience, character, connectedness and prosperity of the community – this is important for bolstering community resilience and is a prerequisite to addressing other planning issues. The authors propose three guidelines for further development of small-town planning frameworks. These include relating land use instruments to urban design and infrastructure practice, using a planning approach that embraces complexity and, importantly, seeking to respect and understand lived experiences of small towns.

Finally, Misener and Schulenkorf (2016) apply an ABCD model approach to sport management, suggesting that it could boost social benefits and the local economy. They suggest that this approach shifts the focus in managing and developing events and their outcomes to emphasising social benefit and lasting economic change that stems from

sporting events. This understudied yet promising approach focuses strongly on enhancing existing strengths of a community.

Discussion

The themes identified through this review have summarised the challenges that some groups in our community face, which impact their livelihood. At the same time, findings point to several strengths that can be drawn upon in alleviating these challenges. Asset-based community approaches, therefore, offer a promising way to harness these strengths to solve issues at a community level and increase resilience of individuals within the community. This review has revealed that many of the themes are closely interrelated. Integration and identity have a large contributing factor to improving mental health through feelings of connectedness and support. Meaningful employment helps not only meet financial needs but also helps bolster a sense of integration within the community and builds identity post-migration. More broadly, employment has been shown to have a varied impact on physical and mental health. Similarly, within education, schools have a unique opportunity to also build a sense of integration and identity for children and adolescents and are also a contributing factor to mental health. For adults, education opportunities can help employment outcomes. Asset-based approaches can be promising in solving issues that each of these areas raises through asset-focused community planning. Community-led initiatives, such as tourism and sporting organisations that acknowledge the importance of place and community, could help provide a place for engagement that can build community resilience by boosting outcomes in multiple areas, including employment, mental health and integration.

The results of this review suggest that many factors associated with successful integration and outcomes of refugee groups are impacted by their pre-migration experiences, which persist long after resettlement. Service providers should use a trauma-informed approach when dealing with refugee groups, as impacts of trauma have been shown to have long-lasting impacts. Cultural differences should also be considered when designing programs aimed at successful integration.

The theme of mental health in particular illustrates the challenges refugees face due to a lack of integration and support networks. This lack of social support comes as a natural result of migration and may be exacerbated by culture and language barriers. Many sources have also found that social networks are useful for refugees practically as a way to access knowledge about relevant community services that could facilitate their belonging and inclusion in Australia. Cheng *et al.* (2020) has argued that because of this, improved community engagement can help refugees in multiple ways, such as increasing health education and access to services.

Boyd *et al.* (2008) and Momartin *et al.* (2018) demonstrated the link between social connectedness and mental health by presenting examples of successful asset-based approaches in bolstering community engagement. Others have also found similar results due to better integration within the community.

A review of the sources within education and employment themes suggests that these two areas can be vital for boosting community resilience as they simultaneously increase community engagement and improve individual outcomes if carefully planned. Fozdar and Torezani (2008) have found that an improvement in employment outcomes can improve social cohesion and wellbeing whilst lowering discrimination faced by refugees. In education, Ziaian (2018) found that schools can promote belonging and engagement by recognising values and practises of refugee students and their families. Bottrell's (2007) case study suggests that asset-based approaches in the education sector could be promising in promoting resilience within marginalised youth.

Others have also commented on an overall lack of adequate programs and strategies to help transition and boost successful integration with schooling. These programs are especially important to enhance academic outcomes for marginalised students. [Stephens et al. \(2013\)](#) demonstrate that asset-based approaches could be beneficial in this area after finding some initial success in training courses within an Indigenous Australian community. They argue that education is the largest single contributor in improving employment for Indigenous Australians, and hence, an appropriate model of adult education within this community is needed to empower, educate and connect people together to bridge inequalities.

Within multiple themes, the role of religion and spirituality has been highlighted, with multiple sources citing this as a protective factor against issues brought about by poor mental and physical health that can consequently help bolster resilience ([Dowling et al., 2020](#); [Schweitzer et al., 2007](#); [Fozdard et al., 2008](#)). Surprisingly, this seems to be understudied. Given the importance of culture that has been exemplified within literature with a focus on integration and identity and education, we suspect that religion plays an integral role in one's identity, as well as fostering a sense of connection and community.

Another commonality that has emerged from multiple themes is the challenges that emerge from current governmental policy surrounding refugees. This poses a particular challenge for successful integration, as "in-between" refugee status can be a barrier to finding employment, accessing education opportunities, English programs and health services. [Fleay et al. \(2013\)](#) labelled the policy regarding employment for refugees as being "one-way integration" where refugees are left to cope on their own in terms of integrating into the community. Instead, the authors argue that initiatives should help develop a more of a "two-way process" of integration. To achieve this, there needs to exist a strong connection between practice and policy, as suggested by [Schmitz et al., 2003](#), who, based on similar findings in the USA, suggest that "services cannot exist in a vacuum". In a sense, services should instead provide a "lifeline" in practice with refugees ([Schmitz et al., 2003](#)).

Furthermore, within the theme of mental health, the system has been found to be ill-equipped in dealing with groups with complex needs. Official guidelines from regulatory bodies in general have been helpful in improving access and equity to mental health services in the past, yet surprisingly, no guidelines exist for provision of psychological services to refugees ([Davidson et al., 2008](#)). Therefore, a specific set of guidelines tailored to the mental health of refugees is needed to improve the provision of mental health services available to this group. In addition, a need to reconsider current methods used to assess and treat mental health issues has been identified in the literature. [Murray et al. \(2008\)](#) suggest that practitioners need to rethink existing models of psychotherapy to recognise that the needs of refugees can be diverse and highly dissimilar to other clients. Moreover, [Murray et al. \(2008\)](#) note that before refugee-specific intervention can be designed, practitioners need to also consider appropriate methods to assess neuropsychological functioning and mental health.

Careful and inclusive policy planning, therefore, can help with successful integration of refugees into the Australian community by facilitating service provision, which will help boost community resilience.

More broadly, this study found that Australian literature surrounding asset-based approaches to community resilience was largely focused on refugee resettlement. Considering the disadvantages and hardships faced by refugees throughout their journeys, the focus is not misplaced. Further, many of these findings can be extrapolated to other marginalised groups with caution. Though it is evident that there is room for further research in the space of other minority groups, such as Indigenous Australians, youth and populations living in rural areas. This is especially important as different minority groups have different needs that can only be met by appropriate research and subsequent policy emphasis.

Limitations and strengths

This study has some limitations which are important to note. Firstly, the literature search conducted has been done manually, which could have led to some oversight in identifying other potential sources. Themes were also chosen based on qualitative appraisal of both authors. A more thorough analysis using literature review software such as Nvivo or Covidence could improve identification of themes and enhance screening procedures in this area in the future. Secondly, due to an overall limited number of sources available on the topic, we were generous in including sources in terms of quality. Nevertheless, no sources of questionable quality were identified.

Despite these limitations, this study is the first, to our knowledge, to attempt to synthesise different strands of research regarding ABCD approaches to building resilience, especially within marginalised groups in Australian society.

Policy recommendations

The results of this study provide several implications for practice, policy recommendations and future research into this area. Results suggest that increasing capacity around asset-based coping mechanisms, such as support networks through religious and cultural groups, would promote community development and foster resilience. Furthermore, policy on refugees in multiple areas, such as psychological service provision and employment, should be redesigned in a way that acknowledges their complex and diverse needs and facilitates their integration into the community. Though multiple ways to achieve this goal have been explored in literature, a sustained and broader approach is necessary to see widespread change. Further research and funding are required to explore and implement appropriate responses. Based on the findings and discussion above, the authors make the following policy recommendations:

- Service providers need to be aware of and incorporate culturally appropriate programs in the areas of mental health assessment and intervention, education and employment.
A trauma-informed approach should be used when dealing with refugee groups and other groups who have faced hardships.
- Government policy should focus on improving community engagement to create and strengthen social networks, which are vital in boosting integration into the community and increasing health education and access to services.
- Government should focus on asset-based approaches in designing education and employment integration programs to promote social belonging and community engagement, and thus, community resilience, which will consequently have beneficial individual and group outcomes.
- The current governmental policy surrounding refugees should be overhauled with the goal of successful refugee integration in mind, such as incorporating the ability for refugees to access vital services such as employment and skills transferability programs. Due to current policy, these services are inaccessible to a large portion of refugees, hindering their integration.
- Government needs to create specific guidelines for the provision of psychological services to refugees to improve the quality of mental health services available to this group.

Conclusion

Our review has found a dearth of literature using an asset-based framework to examine the experiences, issues and needs of refugees resettling in Australia. Though, asset-based approaches have less so been applied to other marginalised groups such as rural Indigenous communities and young people. Literature was summarised according to six

themes that were identified to be central to this topic, including integration and identity, health, mental health, education, employment and community planning.

The results of this review suggest that refugees and other marginalised groups often face issues within the aforementioned areas. Asset-based approaches, such as those identified within the theme of community planning could be useful to alleviate issues in these areas by harnessing the strengths of these groups. In turn, mitigating these issues will build the resilience of these groups and the wider community. However, several caveats have emerged from the available literature in regard to the planning and implementation of asset-based programs. Firstly, individual needs should be considered, such as cultural identity and practices and pre-migration experiences. Secondly, in order for asset-based programs to be successful, policy should be designed in a way that considers complex needs of marginalised groups and facilitates integration. Finally, for these approaches to be truly asset-based, programs should be designed with input and led by the community.

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