# 'We Are Not Here to Claim Better Services Than Any Other': Social Exclusion among Men from Refugee Backgrounds in Urban and Regional Australia

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This article reports on a mixed-methods study of social exclusion experiences among 233 resettled refugees living in urban and regional Queensland, Australia. The findings reported here are drawn from the SettleMEN project, a longitudinal investigation of health and settlement experiences among recently arrived adult men from refugee backgrounds conducted between 2008 and 2010. Using questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews, we examine four key dimensions of social exclusion: production, consumption, social relations, and services. We show that, overall, participants experienced high levels of social exclusion across all four dimensions. Participants living in regional areas were significantly more likely to be excluded from production, social relations, and services. We argue that there is a pressing need to tackle barriers to economic participation and discrimination in order to promote the social inclusion of men from refugee backgrounds.

Keywords: social exclusion, resettlement, refugee men, Australia

## Introduction

The resettlement of refugees is a growing global challenge amid a trend of decreasing numbers of refugees able to voluntarily repatriate to their country

of origin along with an increasing demand for resettlement (UNHCR 2009). By the end of 2009 there were an estimated 15.2 million refugees, 10.4 million of whom were under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' mandate (UNHCR 2010). In 2010 there were some 80,000 resettlement places available across 23 countries, which met only 40 per cent of UNHCR's perceived need for 203,000 places (Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme 2010). In the 2009–2010 financial year, Australia granted 13,770 refugee and humanitarian visas; 67 per cent of these were resettlement cases under the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program, and the other 33 per cent were for people who sought asylum onshore (DIAC 2011). Countries providing resettlement programmes do so voluntarily as part of the global sharing of responsibility to protect refugees and provide a durable solution. The receiving country is expected to provide refugees with support services and access to resources that facilitate 'integration' into the host society (UNHCR 2011). Facilitating refugee integration is a particular requirement of Article 34 of the UN Refugee Convention (United Nations General Assembly 1951).

The process of refugee settlement can be analysed using the concept of social exclusion, which directs our attention to the barriers individuals or groups encounter to full and equitable participation in economic, social, cultural and political domains. The dismantling of such barriers is a ne-cessary condition for the long-term integration of resettled refugees in the host society (Omidvar and Richmond 2003). Recently resettled refugees may be particularly vulnerable to social exclusion in certain contexts (Correa-Velez *et al*. 2010). Factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, lack of social support and experiences of discrimination have been found to contribute to anxiety, depression and feelings of social isolation among resettled refugees (McMichael and Manderson 2004; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007a; Gifford *et al*. 2009; Correa-Velez *et al*. 2010). The skills and talents of refugees are often not encouraged to flourish as they might (Stanley 2005, Phillimore and Goodson 2006, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007b).

Social exclusion remains a relatively unexamined concept in refugee research (exceptions are Chile 2002; Omidvar and Richmond 2003; Taylor 2004; White 2004). In this article we report on a mixed-methods study of social exclusion among resettled refugees in urban and regional Australia. The findings reported here are part of the SettleMEN project, a two-year longitudinal investigation of the health and settlement experiences of recently arrived adult men from refugee backgrounds living in South East Queensland. Central to the research was the comparison of settlement experi-ences in urban (Brisbane) and in regional (Toowoomba-Gatton) areas, which was informed by the 'new wave of migration reform' that has seen policies of dispersal of refugees away from urban areas to non-metropolitan locations (Johnston *et al*. 2009). Whilst some recent studies evaluate regional resettle-ment initiatives in Australia (Regional Settlement Working Group 2009),

there are none to date that compare regional and urban refugee settlement experiences using a social exclusion framework. Below we will conceptualize social exclusion as it was applied in our study.

## Conceptualizing Social Exclusion

The conceptualization of social exclusion has been a topic of ongoing scholarly debate (Bhalla and Lapeyre 1997; de Haan 1998; Sen 2000; Burchardt *et al*. 2002; Silver and Miller 2003). Most analysts agree that social exclusion conveys a multidimensional process through which individuals or groups are partly or wholly excluded from the society in which they live. The process character of social exclusion is encapsulated in the definition proposed by Levitas *et al*. (2007: 25):

> the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas.

This definition's reference to 'normal' relationships and activities available to 'the majority of people in a society' points to the relativity of social exclusion: it can only be judged by comparing the (non-)participation of some individuals or groups relative to others, in a given place and at a given time (Atkinson 1998).

The concept of social exclusion directs our attention to the mechanisms that act as barriers or facilitators to participation and to the role social institutions play in systematically excluding certain individuals and groups. For example, Berghman (1997) refers to social exclusion in terms of the failure of one or more 'social systems', such as the welfare system, labour market or legal system. Social exclusion can be broken down into a number of dimensions which may or may not be correlated. Individuals or groups may be excluded in some dimensions and for some time and not in others (Burchardt *et al*. 2002). People are generally more likely to be vulnerable to exclusionary processes when they experience difficulties in relation to multiple dimensions (Percy-Smith 2000).

A number of studies have attempted to conceptualize the key dimensions and indicators of social exclusion (Gordon *et al*. 2000; Percy-Smith 2000; Burchardt *et al*. 2002; Levitas *et al*. 2007; Taket *et al*. 2009). Our aim here is not to review these studies at length; rather, we build on them to develop a framework with which to analyse the degree and nature of social exclusion among recently arrived men from refugee backgrounds living in South East Queensland. The starting point is the four dimensions of social exclusion identified by Burchardt *et al*. (2002): production (participation in economically or socially valuable activities); consumption (the capacity to purchase goods and services); social interaction (integration with family, friends, and community); and political engagement (involvement in local or national

decision-making). The political engagement dimension is less relevant to our study because it frames political participation primarily in terms of voting behaviour. Recently arrived refugees in Australia do not have political citizenship rights and are not eligible to vote in elections. From 1 July 2010, people have been able to apply for citizenship if they have been in Australia as permanent residents for a minimum of four years. Recently arrived refugees are thus *de jure* excluded from the most common form of political participation.

The production and consumption dimensions provide a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage. Indicators of production and consumption are employment and education situation, and household income, respectively (Burchardt *et al.* 2002). The social interaction dimension, which Gordon *et al.* (2000) term 'exclusion from social relations', measures people's access to social networks. Gordon *et al.* (2000) also identify 'service exclusion' as a key dimension of social exclusion, which can be measured in terms of people's access to and use of public and private services.

The work of Galabuzi (2004, 2006) further elucidates the issue of access and opportunity. Galabuzi identifies four aspects of social exclusion as it relates to 'racialized' immigrants. Exclusion from social production refers to the denial of opportunities to contribute to and participate in society. Economic exclusion denotes unequal or lack of access to normal forms of livelihood. Exclusion from civil society involves disconnection through legal sanctions, institutional mechanisms or systemic discrimination. Finally, exclusion from social goods refers to the failure of society to provide for the needs of particular groups or to deter discrimination. These four aspects correspond to the aforementioned production, consumption, social relations and services dimensions, but with a particular focus on systemic discrimination as a driver of social exclusion. This focus is consistent with recent research which shows that experiences of discrimination have a negative impact on wellbeing and health outcomes (Krieger *et al.* 2005; Correa-Velez *et al.* 2010).

Table 1 summarizes the dimensions and indicators of social exclusion used to analyse the data from the SettleMEN project. The methods used to elicit the data are discussed below.

## Methods

### Participants, Study Design and Data Collection

The SettleMEN project was a two-year mixed-methods investigation of the health and settlement experiences of recently arrived adult men from refugee backgrounds living in South East Queensland. The study used a quota sampling strategy (Kish 1995), a non-random technique aimed at ensuring that participants were representative (at least in terms of age and region of birth) of the overall population of adult men from refugee backgrounds who arrived in Australia between 2004 and 2008, and settled in the

*Table 1*

**Dimensions and Indicators of Social Exclusion**

| Dimension | Descriptor | Indicators |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Production | Lack or denial of opportunities to participate in economically or socially valuable activities | Employment status<br>Barriers to securing employment<br>Job satisfaction<br>Educational experiences<br>Recognition of overseas skills/ qualifications |
| Consumption | Economic exclusion, i.e. unequal or lack of access to normal forms of livelihood | Weekly income<br>Satisfaction with financial situation |
| Social relations | Social disconnection through legal sanctions, institutional mechanisms or discrimination | Overall discrimination<br>Discrimination accessing services<br>Discrimination in public space<br>Stopped by police<br>Interaction with police |
| Services | Exclusion from key social goods | Access to housing<br>Barriers to accessing health services |

Brisbane (urban) and Toowoomba–Gatton (regional) areas. Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, is Australia's third largest city with a population of 1.76 million people (22 per cent born overseas) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). Toowoomba is located 127 km west of Brisbane with a district population of 115,000 people in 2006 (10 per cent born overseas) while Gatton is a small town of about 6,000 people (10 per cent born overseas) located in the fertile Lockyer Valley, 100 km west of Brisbane (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007).

The SettleMEN study used a peer interviewer research model, where eligible participants were recruited by trained research assistants from the same ethnic communities. Potential participants were informed about the study and those who agreed to participate were asked to sign a consent form. Prior to data collection, research assistants were trained in principles of research methods and ethical conduct of research. The study consisted of a baseline and three follow-up surveys administered at six-month intervals. Surveys were administered face-to-face either in the participant's first language or in English if this was their preferred language. The majority of interviews took place at participants' homes or in community venues. Interview sessions took an average of two hours.

Full ethics approval was obtained from the Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University.

## Measures

The SettleMEN survey included five sections: (i) socio-demographic information; (ii) education and employment; (iii) health and wellbeing; (iv) family and social support; and (v) life in Australia. This paper focuses on the survey components in each section which directly measured the four dimensions of social exclusion outlined in Table 1. The *production* dimension was measured through a series of survey questions concerning five aspects of employment and education: employment status, barriers to securing employment, job satisfaction, educational experiences, and recognition of overseas skills/qualifications. The *consumption* dimension was measured in terms of weekly income and satisfaction with one's financial situation. The *social relations* dimension was addressed through a series of survey questions relating to two indicators: experienced discrimination (discrimination in access to services and in public space) and experiences of policing (stopped by police and interaction with police). Finally, *services* exclusion was measured in terms of access to housing and healthcare. These survey items are described in more detail in Table 2.

In addition to the quantitative surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subsample of 28 participants in order to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' experiences of social exclusion. The selection of these participants was based on the diversity and richness of the information provided during the quantitative surveys regarding their experiences of settlement in Australia (Patton 2002).

## Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software v.17. Mean scores ± standard deviation (s.d.) were used for descriptive purposes. Chi-squared tests (or Fisher exact tests when there were low cell numbers) were used to compare categorical variables between urban and regional areas of settlement at baseline. For binary variables, 95 per cent binomial confidence intervals (CI) were generated using Wilson's method (Newcombe 1998). Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) (Diggle *et al*. 1996) with an exchangeable correlation were used to predict social exclusion indicators over time on the basis of area of settlement, adjusting for age (in years), region of birth (Africa versus other), marital status (never married versus other), highest education level (none/primary, secondary, tertiary/trade), religious affiliation (Christian versus other), time since arriving in Australia (in months), English language proficiency (poor versus good), employment status (unemployed versus employed), weekly income (less than A\$400 versus A\$400 or more), social support ('number of people close to you'; three or less versus four or more), subjective health status ('how satisfied are you with your

*Table 2*

**Measures of Social Exclusion Used in the SettleMEN Study**

| Dimension | Item/scale | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Production | Employment status: 'What is your current employment status?' Item dichotomized into 0=unemployed, 1= employed | N/A |
| | Barriers to securing employment: 7-item scale assessing problems getting qualifications recognized; requirement to have Australian work experience; requirement to have referees in Australia; lack of opportunities for work experience in refugee camps; breaks in working life; difficulties getting promoted; and necessity of having a car (adapted from Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007a). Scale ranged from 0=no barriers, to 7=multiple barriers. Scale dichotomized based on median. | 0.68 |
| | Job satisfaction: 'Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your current job?' (1=very dissatisfied, to 5=very satisfied) (Schriesheim and Tsui 2002). Item dichotomised based on median. | N/A |
| | Educational experiences: 7-item educational experiences scale assessing respondents' learning difficulties (literacy, numeracy, English language, and computer skills); interaction with and support from teachers/lecturers; experiences of discrimination from peers and teachers (Onsando 2007). Scores ranged from 7 (mostly negative experiences) to 35 (mostly positive experiences). Scale was dichotomized based on the median value. | 0.76 |
| | Recognition of overseas skills and qualifications: 'Have your previous overseas skills/qualifications been recognized in Australia?' (adapted from Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007a). Item dichotomized into 0=not recognized, 1=partially or fully recognized | N/A |
| Consumption | Weekly income: 'What is your approximate total weekly income?' Item dichotomized into 0=less than A$400 per week, and 1=A$400 per week or more | N/A |
| | Satisfaction with financial situation: 'How satisfied are you with your financial situation?' (1=not at all satisfied, to 4=entirely satisfied) (adapted from Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007a). Item dichotomized into 0=dissatisfied and 1=satisfied) | N/A |

(*continued*)

Table 2 *Continued*

| Dimension | Item/scale | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Social relations | Overall discrimination: 'Since arriving in Australia have you ever experienced discrimination, been prevented from doing something, or been hassled or made to feel inferior, because of your ethnicity, religion, or colour?' (0=no, 1=yes) (Krieger *et al.* 2005) | N/A |
| | Discrimination accessing services: Have felt discriminated at an educational institution; getting medical care; getting service in a store or restaurant; getting credit, bank loans or a mortgage (0=no, 1=yes) | N/A |
| | Discrimination in a public space: Have felt discriminated on the street; from the police; in public places like shops and trains; in your neighbourhood (0=no, 1=yes) | N/A |
| | Stopped by police: 'Since arriving in Australia (or 'over the last 6 months' for follow-ups), how many times have you been stopped and questioned by police?' Dichotomized into 0=never, 1=one or more. | N/A |
| | Interaction with police: 'In general, how would you describe your interaction with police in Australia' (1=very poor, to 5=very good). Item dichotomized into 0=poor, 1=good) | N/A |
| Services | Access to housing: Difficulties accessing housing (0=no, 1=yes) | N/A |
| | Barriers to accessing health services: 6-item scale assessing lack of: interpreters; money; information about healthcare; healthcare professionals from respondents' own ethnic background; transport to attend appointments; and trust towards health professionals (adapted from Finney Lamb and Smith 2002; Sheikh-Mohammed *et al.* 2006). Scale scores ranged from 0=not at all, to 12=extremely. Scale dichotomized into 0=a little (lower tertiles), 1=quite a bit (upper tertile). | 0.68 |

health?'; dissatisfied versus satisfied), psychological distress (25-item Hopkins Symptoms Checklist, HSCL-25) (Derogatis *et al.* 1974), and trauma symptoms (16 Post-traumatic Stress Disorder items of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, HTQ) (Mollica *et al.* 1992). Both adjusted and unadjusted models are presented.

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis (Patton 2002). Open, axial and selective coding were conducted to ensure the reliability and

validity of judgment-based decisions (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This process was not necessarily sequential; as new themes and sub-themes emerged, the observations were compared and the data were re-examined.

### Findings

*Participants' Characteristics*

A total of 233 participants were recruited into the study. Of these, 232 were resettled refugees and one was granted asylum after arriving in Australia on a student visa. This participant was never in immigration detention and his protection visa conferred the same benefits granted to all resettled refugees. At the fourth and final follow-up (18-month), 210 participants completed the questionnaire, for a total attrition rate of just 10 per cent. Those who dropped out of the study were significantly more likely to live in urban areas (p=0.004) and to be employed at the first interview (p=0.012). There were no statistically significant differences between those who were lost to follow-up and those who completed the last interview in terms of region of birth, age, marital status, time in Australia, highest educational level, and English language proficiency.

At the first interview, 176 (76 per cent) participants were living in urban areas and 57 (24 per cent) were settled in regional areas. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 69 years (mean ± s.d. = 32 ± 9 years). Overall, 118 (51 per cent) participants were born in Sudan, 29 (13 per cent) in Burma (Myanmar), 29 (13 per cent) in Iraq, 22 (9 per cent) in Burundi, 15 (6 per cent) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 10 (4 per cent) in Rwanda, 5 (2 per cent) in Liberia, and the remaining 5 (2 per cent) in other countries (Afghanistan, Congo-Brazzaville, Iran, Tanzania and Uganda). Their average time in Australia ranged from less than one month to 57 months (mean ± s.d. = 24 ± 17 months).

Table 3 compares key socio-demographic characteristics of the SettleMEN participants at the first interview by area of settlement. All participants settled in the regional areas were born in Africa. Compared with those living in urban areas, participants in regional areas were significantly less likely to have a tertiary or trade qualification, and more likely to be single (never married), have lived longer in Australia, and report good levels of English language proficiency.

*Quantitative Measures of Social Exclusion*

The indicators of social exclusion at the first interview, by area of settlement, are shown in Table 4. Overall, compared to men living in urban areas, those settled in regional areas were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs, report negative experiences at Australian educational institutions, have failed in the recognition of their overseas skills and qualifications, report

*Table 3*

**Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants at First Interview by Area of Settlement**

| Characteristic[a] | Overall N = 233 (100%) | Urban N = 176 (76%) | Regional N = 57 (24%) | P value % difference [95% CI] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region of birth | | | | |
|   Africa | 173 (74%) | 116 (66%) | 57 (100%) | P < 0.001 |
|   Middle East | 31 (13%) | 31 (18%) | 0 | |
|   Southeast Asia | 29 (13%) | 29 (16%) | 0 | |
| Age categories (years) | | | | |
|   18–40 | 193 (83%) | 144 (82%) | 49 (86%) | P = 0.471 |
|   41 and over | 40 (17%) | 32 (18%) | 8 (14%) | 4% [–8, 13] |
| Marital status | | | | |
|   Never married | 103 (44%) | 68 (39%) | 35 (61%) | P = 0.009 |
|   Married/cohabiting | 120 (52%) | 99 (56%) | 21 (37%) | |
|   Separated/widowed | 10 (4%) | 9 (5%) | 1 (2%) | |
| Highest educational level | | | | |
|   None/Primary school | 31 (13%) | 23 (13%) | 8 (14%) | P = 0.002 |
|   Secondary school | 145 (63%) | 100 (57%) | 45 (79%) | |
|   Tertiary education/ Trade | 56 (24%) | 52 (30%) | 4 (7%) | |
| Time in Australia | | | | |
|   2 years or less | 119 (51%) | 104 (59%) | 15 (26%) | P < 0.001 |
|   More than 2 years | 114 (49%) | 72 (41%) | 42 (74%) | 33% [17, 45] |
| English language proficiency | | | | |
|   Poor | 72 (31%) | 64 (37%) | 8 (14%) | P = 0.001 |
|   Good | 160 (69%) | 111 (63%) | 49 (86%) | 23% [8, 33] |

[a]Valid cases

overall experiences of discrimination, including discrimination while accessing services and in public spaces, have been stopped by police since arriving in Australia, and have experienced difficulties accessing housing. Sixty-three per cent of participants reported a weekly income of less than A$400, which was roughly the estimated poverty line for a single person in Australia in the 2008 June quarter (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2008).

Similar differences in the social exclusion indicators were found at baseline between SettleMEN participants from African backgrounds settling in urban and regional areas (Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009).

Table 5 shows the unadjusted and adjusted GEE models for the social exclusion indicators over time on the basis of area of settlement. After

*Table 4*

**Indicators of Social Exclusion at First Interview by Area of Settlement**

| Dimension | Indicator[a] | Overall N = 233 (100%) | Urban N = 176 (76%) | Regional N = 57 (24%) | P value % difference [95% CI] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Production | Unemployed | 120/215 (56%) | 91/159 (57%) | 29/56 (52%) | P = 0.480 5% [–9, 20] |
| | Major barriers to securing employment | 86/151 (57%) | 56/108 (52%) | 30/43 (70%) | P = 0.051 18% [–1, 33] |
| | Dissatisfied with job | 48/98 (49%) | 28/71 (39%) | 20/27 (74%) | P = 0.002 35% [11, 53] |
| | Mostly negative experiences at educational institutions | 75/166 (45%) | 50/131 (38%) | 25/35 (71%) | P < 0.001 33% [13, 49] |
| | Overseas skills or qualifications not recognized | 78/97 (80%) | 56/75 (75%) | 22/22 (100%) | P = 0.005 25% [5, 37] |
| Consumption | Weekly income less than A$400 | 145/229 (63%) | 112/173 (65%) | 33/56 (59%) | P = 0.433 6% [–9, 21] |
| | Dissatisfied with financial situation | 86/228 (38%) | 61/171 (36%) | 25/57 (44%) | P = 0.269 8% [–7, 24] |
| Social relations | Ever discriminated in Australia | 95/230 (41%) | 52/173 (30%) | 43/57 (75%) | P < 0.001 45% [30, 57] |
| | Discriminated while accessing services | 63/233 (27%) | 28/176 (16%) | 35/57 (61%) | P < 0.001 45% [30, 59] |
| | Discriminated in public spaces | 70/233 (30%) | 36/176 (21%) | 34/57 (60%) | P < 0.001 39% [24, 53] |
| | Stopped by police | 91/232 (39%) | 52/175 (30%) | 39/57 (68%) | P < 0.001 38% [23, 52] |
| | Poor interaction with police | 32/121 (26%) | 14/70 (20%) | 18/51 (35%) | P = 0.060 15% [–2, 32] |
| Services | Difficulties accessing housing | 108/233 (46%) | 51/176 (29%) | 57/57 (100%) | P < 0.001 71% [60, 77] |
| | Major barriers to accessing health services | 54/231 (23%) | 42/175 (24%) | 12/56 (21%) | P = 0.692 3% [–12, 14] |

[a]Valid cases

*Table 5*

**Unadjusted and Adjusted GEE Models for Social Exclusion Indicators over Time on the Basis of Area of Settlement among Recently Arrived Men from Refugee Backgrounds (regional is the response category and urban is the reference category)**

| Dimension | Indicator | Unadjusted OR (95% CI) | Adjusted[a] OR (95% CI) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Production | Unemployed[b] | 0.8 (0.5, 1.2) | 0.9 (0.5, 1.7) |
| | Major barriers to securing employment in Australia | 3.1 (2.0, 4.7)*** | 3.3 (2.0, 5.5)*** |
| | Dissatisfied with job | 6.6 (3.6, 11.9)*** | 10.7 (5.2, 21.9)*** |
| | Negative experiences at educational institutions in Australia | 5.8 (3.4, 9.9)*** | 4.5 (2.4, 8.4)*** |
| | No recognition of overseas skills or qualifications | 2.2 (0.9, 5.2) | 5.3 (1.5, 18.5)** |
| Consumption | Low weekly income (<A\$400) | 0.8 (0.6, 1.2) | 1.8 (0.8, 4.1) |
| | Dissatisfied with financial situation | 2.0 (1.4, 3.0)*** | 0.8 (0.5, 1.4) |
| Social relations | Ever discriminated in Australia | 8.0 (5.2, 12.4)*** | 5.9 (3.4, 10.2)*** |
| | Discriminated while accessing services | 16.0 (10.9, 23.6)*** | 15.9 (9.7, 26.3)*** |
| | Discriminated in public spaces | 6.8 (4.8, 9.6)*** | 7.0 (4.5, 10.9)*** |
| | Stopped by police[c] | 5.8 (3.8, 8.9)*** | 6.5 (3.9, 10.9)*** |
| | Poor interaction with police[c] | 1.6 (1.0, 2.4)* | 1.6 (0.9, 2.9) |
| Services | Difficulties accessing housing | 33.2 (18.0, 61.2)*** | 34.5 (14.5, 83.3)*** |
| | Major barriers to accessing health services | 0.9 (0.6, 1.5) | 1.8 (1.0, 3.2) |

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001
[a]Adjusted for age, region of birth, marital status, highest education level, religious affiliation, time since arriving in Australia, English language proficiency, employment status, weekly income, social support, subjective health status, psychological distress, trauma symptoms; [b]employment status not included as covariate; [c]also adjusted for having a car.

adjusting for potential confounders, participants living in regional areas were significantly more likely to be excluded from production, social relations and services. In terms of production, men in regional areas were significantly more likely to report higher barriers to securing employment in Australia, feel dissatisfied with their jobs, report negative experiences at educational institutions, and no recognition of overseas skills or qualifications than

those participants living in urban areas. The social relations dimension analysis showed that refugee men in regional areas were significantly more likely than their urban counterparts to report overall experiences of discrimination, discrimination while accessing services, discrimination in public spaces, and also more likely to have been stopped by police (even after controlling for having a car). In terms of exclusion from services, participants in regional areas were significantly more likely to have experienced difficulties accessing housing. The adjusted models of economic exclusion indicators showed no significant differences between men living in regional areas and those in urban areas.

A number of social exclusion indicators reported statistically significant changes over the study period (after controlling for region of birth, age, time in Australia, marital status, educational level, religious affiliation, English language proficiency, and area of settlement): major barriers to securing employment increased from 57 per cent of participants at the first interview to 83 per cent 18 months later (OR=1.5; 95 per cent CI [1.3–1.8]; P < 0.001); lack of recognition of previous skills and qualifications decreased from 80 per cent to 65 per cent (OR=0.6; 95 per cent CI [0.5–0.8]; P < 0.001]; weekly income of less than A$400 decreased from 63 per cent to 42 per cent (OR=0.8; 95 per cent CI [0.7–1.0]; P=0.011); overall experiences of discrimination increased from 41 per cent to 63 per cent (OR=1.3; 95 per cent CI [1.1–1.5]; P=0.001) and this trend was significantly greater among men living in regional areas (OR=1.4; 95 per cent CI [1.0–2.0]; P=0.034); and discrimination in public spaces increased from 30 per cent to 51 per cent (OR=2.2; 95 per cent CI [1.3–3.7]; P=0.004), being significantly greater among men in regional areas (OR=6.8; 95 per cent CI [4.4–10.5]; P < 0.001). Although being stopped by police did not change significantly over time for the overall sample of participants, it increased significantly among men in regional areas compared to those in urban areas, even after controlling for having a car (OR=1.5; 95 per cent CI [1.2–2.1]; P=0.003).

*Qualitative Measures*

The qualitative data provided detailed descriptions of participants' experiences of social exclusion which complement the survey data. In many instances, these experiences showed the interconnections between the four dimensions of social exclusion.

*Exclusion from Production*

Exclusion from production was reflected in the multiple barriers faced by participants while trying to secure employment in Australia. Among the reported barriers were the requirement to have Australian work experience, the lack of employment programmes that cater for the needs of people from

refugee backgrounds, lack of own transport, and experiences of discrimination, indicative of which are the following comments:

> There is discrimination, sometimes they don't even look at your application or résumé checking if you are suitable for the job or not and if you have experience from overseas, they just don't bother checking they only want experience from Australia . . . How do they expect them to have Australian experiences if they are not given a chance? (26 years old, Iraqi-born, two years in Australia, urban area).

> The employment agencies that are being funded by the government seem not to be doing their work. They assume that everyone has experience being required by the workforce. I don't see any services being delivered in particular because the agencies treated the migrants at the same level as the native Australians. They don't bridge the gap between the migrants and the native Australians. (28, Sudanese-born, five years in Australia, regional).

Exclusion from production was also reflected in negative educational experiences, which were more common among participants living in regional areas, corroborating the findings presented in Tables 4 and 5. Financial difficulties and the need to support their families impacted significantly on the participants' capacity to undertake and complete their studies:

> There is financial problem. This is a big obstacle affecting students to complete their studies. In addition, we have also family members whom we are worried for who need financial assistance back in Africa. Thus many students have sometimes to leave studies and do some work so as to assist the relatives back home (25, Sudanese born, five years in Australia, regional).

Several participants felt excluded by the lack of recognition of their previous overseas skills and qualifications. Many experienced difficulties in education, reflective of which is the following comment:

> When we get here, we are reduced to the lowest level as if we were children who have never been at school . . . the education system is different. Back home in Africa, the teacher dictates notes and does everything. When here, the teacher tells you to use the computer, use the internet while you do not know to use it. Tomorrow when the teacher comes [s/he says] 'How can't you do this?' So this becomes a pressure and you feel at the bottom compared to other students (41, born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, three years in Australia, urban).

Poor interaction with and lack of support from students and teachers were also reported by a number of participants:

> In our classroom where we are given our lecture or tutorial, we really feel isolated and when we engage in our tutorial most of the people from Australian background actually group themselves alone and as a result someone from a refugee background feels discouraged (43, Sudanese-born, four years in Australia, regional).

There was a sense of frustration among participants because many of those who completed tertiary degrees in Australia were unable to find work in their particular fields of study and were forced to perform low-skilled and low-paid jobs. One respondent argued:

> Most of the students who finished [degrees] here in the University are working in the meat factory of which no one actually specialized in meat . . . so we are forced to do something which is not relevant to your career and we have been writing hundreds of applications and at the end of the day you end up not knowing what is going on (43, Sudanese-born, four years in Australia, regional).

### Exclusion from Consumption

The survey data showed that 63 per cent of participants at the first interview had a weekly income below the estimated poverty line, which suggests a significant degree of economic exclusion. Financial difficulties and lack of access to adequate forms of livelihood led some respondents to feel that their life in Australia was getting worse. For some, their reliance on social welfare payments made them feel at the bottom of the social ladder:

> My life is getting worse because I do not have a job. . . . Sometimes the whole money I get from Centrelink [welfare] only pays the rent and nothing is left for food. . . . Sometimes I'm obliged to ask for food assistance from friends, otherwise it's starvation . . . (34, Burundi-born, four years in Australia, urban).

> If I compare my life with the other Australians in fact we are the last. We are in the bottom class of Australia. If you rely on Centrelink income where will you go with money as you cannot afford insurance? So we the refugees are last people in Australia (42, Sudanese-born, four years in Australia, regional).

However, the interview responses signalled the diversity in experiences of economic exclusion, with the majority of respondents being satisfied with their financial situation. Pre-settlement experiences were likely to influence their perceptions of life in Australia, as the following remark indicates:

> My life is getting better because I study for free, and the government helps me if I don't have money for rent, buy food, go to school. In fact my life is getting better compared to where I have been before in the refugee camp in Uganda where if you don't have money nobody helps you (22, Sudanese-born, three years in Australia, regional).

In other words, participants' perceived economic exclusion seems to be relative not only to the majority of people in a given place (Atkinson 1998), but also to different time points in their personal life trajectories. Further research is needed to investigate the contributing factors to refugees'

exclusion from consumption and satisfaction with their financial situation in resettlement contexts.

## Exclusion from Social Relations

The survey data pointed to the significance of experiences of discrimination as a driver of social exclusion. The qualitative data corroborated this finding, showing that experiences of discrimination were widespread: on the street and public places, in the neighbourhood, in stores and restaurants, and from the police. Participants living in regional areas and those who had been in Australia for a longer period of time were more likely to report discrimination. Experiences prior to their arrival in Australia influenced men's assessment of the impact of discrimination upon their lives. Feelings of helplessness were common among participants when dealing with discrimination:

> I was near a train station on one Sunday evening when a group of people taunted me saying . . . 'Stupid Asian, come here, let's have a fun time'. They were very aggressive towards me and I don't know what to do but run. I was very angry but can't do anything except run away from them . . . I have seen discrimination everywhere and I have to deal with it (31, born in Burma, two years in Australia, urban).

> Discrimination could be in many forms. Sometimes people can just shout at you when you are walking on the footpath. People gossip on you when you are there . . . I think it will not go away but we ignore them even if they keep talking (. . .) in fact discrimination is everywhere, at workplace and wherever you go . . . but even if you know that you have been discriminated and you have no evidence then it is a waste of time to complain, and even if you have evidence you need a lawyer but due to financial problems you can't afford one. The best solution to discrimination is to ignore it because if you think about it will harm you (42 years old, Sudanese-born, four years in Australia, regional).

Poor interaction with police was another common theme in the qualitative data. A number of participants in both urban and regional areas felt targeted by police, especially while driving a car. In some instances this interaction would escalate into conflict:

> What I can see regarding police is that when ten people go on a road, police see a black man and pulls him by the road side yet leaving other white people. If police is for all the people, everybody should be treated the same with high dignity. The worst thing is when black people see police . . . they run away from them at high speed. It happened to me when I was pulled by the same police officer four times in three months. I asked, 'are you the only police officer on the road looking for me?' (42, Sudanese-born, five years in Australia, urban).

Previous experiences with police or military personnel in participants' countries of origin or in refugee camps, and lack of knowledge of

Australian laws were likely to influence the men's perceptions of and inter-action with police in Australia, as the following comments indicate:

> Some policemen are really good but some are very rude. Police need informa-tion about dealing with refugees. I know police will not arrest me for no reason but I came from a country where police are seen as bloodsuckers so whenever I see police whether on streets or cars, I still have fear in my mind (31 years old, born in Burma, two years in Australia, urban).

> The refugees are to learn more about the laws of the new country Australia. It is because where we come from has different laws and now where we are, has its own different laws. Indeed many of us are confused ... and that's why some community members have misunderstandings with the police (25 years old, Sudanese-born, five years in Australia, regional).

### Exclusion from Services

Having access to social goods available to most Australians was seen as important to feeling equal to other Australians and to a sense of social inclusion:

> We are not here to claim better services than any other. The same services given to Australians who were born here should be given to us. We don't need to be treated as special people. We are all the same (43, Sudanese-born, four years in Australia, regional).

In reality, the aspiration of equity was not always met. Finding suitable and accessible housing represented a significant challenge for the participants and their families. Most participants were living in private rental accommo-dation and paid high rental fees relative to their income. Many felt over-whelmed by the difficulties associated with attempting to find suitable housing. One respondent argued:

> If you apply for the house to rent they [real states agencies] assess the income you have and if you are not working it might be difficult to get that property. So that is one of the main problems people from refugee [backgrounds] face as most of them are not working. Second issue is that we live in group or extended family because that is part of our culture ... most of the landlords think that if they allow large family to rent his property, then their property would be damaged ... As a result of that majority of the families are rejected (32, Sudanese-born, three years in Australia, regional).

Overall, participants were satisfied with the health services available in Australia. However, participants living in regional areas reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with getting help in times of medical emergency. They reported that only a small number of general practitioners provided services to refugee families, and identified the lack of bulk-billing (where the doctor is paid a scheduled fee directly by the government and cannot charge

any co-payment to the patient) and the absence of an interpreter as common barriers to accessing primary healthcare services.

## Discussion

Overall, our study has found high levels of social exclusion among this group of 233 men from refugee backgrounds living in Queensland. Exclusion was prevalent across the four dimensions investigated in this article. Exclusion from production was reflected in high levels of unemployment, major barriers to securing employment, job dissatisfaction, negative educational experiences at Australian institutions, and unsuccessful recognition of overseas skills and qualifications. Despite the significance of decent work for participants' sense of belonging, 56 per cent were unemployed at the first interview, while several others reported job insecurity and/or dissatisfaction. This figure stands out against the overall unemployment rates of 3.4 per cent in Brisbane and 3.1 per cent in Toowoomba reported in June 2008 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010a, 2010b). Similar to our study, a recent survey found that around 40 per cent of humanitarian entrants had a job of some type four years after arriving in Australia (Australian Survey Research 2011). Among the SettleMEN participants, most of those working were employed in low-skilled and low-paid occupations and many of those who had completed tertiary degrees at Australian educational institutions were still unable to find jobs. These findings largely support previous research conducted in Western Australia which reported the existence of a segmented labour market 'where racially and culturally visible migrants are allocated the bottom jobs regardless of their human capital' (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006: 203). As a consequence, low income was an important indicator of economic exclusion, with 63 per cent of participants having a weekly income below the poverty line at the first interview. Economic exclusion will be partly resolved if the production dimension is improved, which underlines the interconnections between different dimensions of social exclusion.

Experiences of discrimination and poor interaction with police signalled participants' partial exclusion from social relations. Our findings point to the need for greater attention to these issues. Discrimination has been identified as an important resettlement stressor (Montgomery and Foldspang 2008); racial discrimination in particular is associated with ill health (Paradies 2006). A recent review of human rights and social inclusion issues among African Australians found that although

> lack of housing, limited employment opportunities and access to education were barriers to successful settlement and social inclusion, discussion of these issues were overwhelmingly prefaced by problems they encounter from negative stereotypes, prejudice and racism (Australian Human Rights Commission 2010: 8).

Mainstream media and public figures have a great deal of responsibility in counteracting negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and educating the host community on the particular issues faced by recently arrived people from refugee backgrounds.

The human rights and social inclusion review also identified African Australians' concerns about increased scrutiny from police, with some feeling they were being 'over-policed'. These issues call for good practice models of relationship building between police and communities from refugee backgrounds. There is clearly a need to increase refugee communities' knowledge and understanding of Australian laws and the legal system. Police and law enforcement agencies will also benefit from both greater training and education on the pre-arrival experiences and socio-cultural contexts of refugee and humanitarian entrants to Australia, and greater diversity in their workforce.

Limited access to suitable housing was an important indicator of exclusion from services among this group of men from refugee backgrounds. Low income, unemployment, high rental fees and discrimination all contributed to participants' being excluded from the housing market. Similar issues have been documented in New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom (Chile 2002; Richmond 2002; Carter *et al.* 2008), with many refugees living in overcrowded and substandard rental accommodation (San Pedro 2001). Exclusion from services was also reflected in participants' difficulties when accessing healthcare, with one in four participants reporting major barriers. Previous research has also documented systemic barriers resettled refugees face in healthcare settings (Neale *et al.* 2007; McKeary and Newbold 2010).

Central to the study was the comparison of social exclusion experiences in urban and in regional areas. Most western states have some form of geographical dispersal policy ranging from compulsory dispersal (e.g. United Kingdom) to *de facto* dispersal policies (e.g. Finland). In Australia, fulfilling regional economic and social goals was one of the thrusts of a 2004 policy encouraging regional refugee resettlement, which was further supplemented in 2007 with an additional programme of Sustainable Regional Resettlement (DIAC 2010a). This has resulted in 5,366 refugee and humanitarian entrants settling in 15 Local Government Areas between 2004 and 2009, of which Toowoomba received the third highest number of entrants (554) (Karlsen *et al.* 2010). Whilst there may be benefits associated with regional settlement approaches, concerns have been raised that such policies act to further exclude refugees from full participation in society (Johnston *et al.* 2009; Correa-Velez and Onsando 2009). The average incidence of poverty and social exclusion is significantly higher among Australians living in regional areas (Scutella *et al.* 2009), and dispersal policies may exacerbate such problems. Indeed, refugees may be doubly disadvantaged by being sent to rural/ regional areas which are already disadvantaged in comparison to urban areas in Australia. This presents a resettlement dilemma in how best to

accommodate the need to share the burden of refugee settlement on the one hand, and to facilitate social participation of refugees in the context of regional inequality on the other. Our study has found that, overall, men from refugee backgrounds living in regional areas are significantly more likely to experience exclusion from production, social relations, and services.

A number of limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study used a non-probabilistic sampling strategy. Although no claim can be made that this group of participants is representative of the overall population of recently arrived men from refugee backgrounds living in Australia, the sample closely resembles the population of refugee men who settled in urban and regional South East Queensland between 2004 and 2008, at least in terms of region of birth and age (DIAC 2010b). Second, even though significant efforts were made to ensure consistency in the administration of the quantitative measures of social exclusion across participants, such as the training of the peer interviewers, individual differences in interpretation could have occurred. Third, this is an observational study of men from refugee backgrounds with no control group. Therefore, dimensions of social exclusion cannot be accurately compared with groups from other migration categories, or with other disadvantaged populations of Australian men. The limited research conducted to date has found that humanitarian arrivals face greater challenges in the labour market than entrants from other migration categories (Australian Survey Research 2011).

One of the most important implications of this study is the pressing need to tackle barriers to economic participation and discrimination in order to promote the social inclusion of men from refugee backgrounds. A more targeted approach may be required to facilitate men's access to education and to the labour market. This approach could include better support programmes in literacy, numeracy, computer skills and English language at tertiary educational institutions; professional development programmes for teachers and lecturers in relation to the refugee context, students' socio-cultural backgrounds and learning experiences; educating employers and the broader community on strategies to better validate overseas non-formal qualifications and work experience (through flexible traineeships and mentoring programmes for example), and overseas references. Greater consideration by governments and non-government employment providers could be directed towards employment strategies that use friendships and community networks to recruit people into jobs. Addressing racism and discrimination requires whole-of-community multi-level and multi-strategy approaches (Duckitt 2001; Pedersen *et al.* 2005). Clearly, promoting the social inclusion of people from refugee backgrounds will have benefits for the entire host community.

In addition, from a regional settlement policy perspective there is a need to examine models of best practice implemented in other regional areas. This is of particular relevance given the emerging evidence that some regional areas have been able to overcome the challenges of diversity

and provide better settlement outcomes for refugee communities (Shepley 2007).

## Acknowledgements

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