



**EAST TEXAS
— A&M —**

Goals and Expectations of Newcomers: Perspectives of Social Service Providers

Avril W. Knox, DSW & Gracie Brownell, PhD

School of Social Work, East Texas A&M University

Abstract

This study examines the goals and expectations of newcomers, also referred to as refugees, in the United States from the perspectives of social service providers in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. A focus group of eight providers—three American-born and five former newcomers—shared insights into their work with resettled individuals. Thematic analysis revealed three key themes: the perception of newcomers as seeking safety and demonstrating perseverance; the perception of newcomers' goals, as reflected in their aspirations for independence and self-sufficiency; and the perception of newcomers' expectations, highlighting the need for cultural learning and sustainable employment opportunities. Participants emphasized the importance of cultural competency, awareness, and sensitivity to differences to enhance newcomers' resettlement experiences. The focus group discussions highlighted essential traits and practices that support successful integration, providing practical implications for training, policy development, and resource allocation. These findings inform how social services can better advocate for and support newcomer communities through more culturally responsive and effective resettlement strategies.

Introduction

Newcomers are individuals forced to flee their countries due to violence, persecution, or political unrest. By 2017, over 65.6 million people had been forcibly displaced, yet only 22.5 million were registered as refugees or asylum seekers [1]. The United States was once one of the leading nations in newcomer resettlement, where newcomers face significant challenges, including past integration stress and economic hardship [2]. Social service providers play a vital role in helping newcomers rebuild their lives by facilitating access to essential programs and promoting self-sufficiency. However, the success of these efforts depends on the providers' understanding of newcomers' goals and expectations. This study addresses a key gap in the literature by exploring the goals and expectations of newcomers from the perspective of social service providers, aiming to improve resettlement outcomes through informed and culturally competent practice.



Methods

This exploratory study employs qualitative research methods. The qualitative data used in this study is a subset of a larger study that explored the integrative nature of resettlement services, social service providers' perspectives on newcomers' goals and expectations, and best practices of caring for newcomers. Eight social service providers were recruited from four resettlement agencies in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex using a purposeful strategy. Data were collected through a focus group discussion, which was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for thematic content.

Results / Findings

The thematic analysis revealed three themes, the social service providers' perception of a newcomer, perception of newcomers' goals, and the perception of newcomers' expectations.

Perception of a Newcomer:

Seeking Safety

- Participants unanimously agreed that newcomers flee due to political or social conflict. Newcomers do not come here because they want to be here. They come because they have no choice."

Persistence to Overcome Powerlessness

- Newcomers experience a lack of choice or powerlessness in becoming newcomers and during reintegration. One participant captured the newcomer experience as "seeking safety and persistence to overcome powerlessness."

Perception of Newcomers' Goals:

Gaining Independence/Self-sufficiency

- Every service provider shared that "economic self-sufficiency is crucial for a newcomer." Gaining independence demonstrates a successful outcome. Newcomers' independence not only helps one individual, it can support an entire community."

Perception of Newcomers' Expectations:

Cultural Information

- Newcomers "expect to be provided with knowledge about the resettlement process as well as some form of cultural information." The newcomer receives cultural orientation overseas... then again at the statewide newcomer affiliate agency."

❖ **Subtheme Perceptions:**

Cultural Competency and Confidence in Resettlement Agencies

Participants emphasized the need to "master the newcomer process and practice cultural humility, competence, and sensitivity." Cultural competency and sensitivity are essential." Knowing something about the newcomer will also give you the tools to serve the newcomer better." Knowing the newcomer's background is necessary. This knowledge allows the newcomer to trust you and confide in you."

Gaining Employment

- Newcomers are expected to "find employment or some other income source." Many of them work in their positions for many years and are trained by the social service providers."

Conclusions

The implications for social service providers were emphasized in three areas: Practice Implications, Educational Implications, and Policy Implications. The study provides a new and insightful perspective on social service providers' perceptions of newcomers, including their characteristics, goals, and expectations. The findings can be used to enhance resettlement service delivery by improving providers' knowledge of the resettlement process and the crucial role that cultural competency and sensitivity play in improving resources, service delivery, and outcomes. The findings in this study can also inform social service providers' recruitment and training efforts, promoting specialized experiences and ongoing development in cultural competency and sensitivity [3]. In addition to guiding practice and educational efforts, the findings from this study can also inform the development of policies and future research related to newcomers in the United States [4].



References

1. Steele, L., Abdelaaty, L., & Than, N. (2022). Attitudes about refugees and immigrants arriving in the United States: a conjoint experiment. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46(10), 2163-2191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2159475>
2. UNHCR. (2017a). *Refugees in America*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/U.S.a/>
3. Gleeson, C., Frost, R., Sherwood, L., Shevlin, M., Hyland, P., Halpin, R., Murphy, J., & Silove, D. (2020). Post-migration factors and mental health outcomes in asylum-seeking and refugee populations: A systematic review. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2020.1793567>
4. Capps, R., Newland, K., Fratzke, S., Groves, S., Fix, M., McHugh, M., & Auclair, G. (2015). The integration outcomes of U.S. refugees: Successes and challenges. *Migration Policy Institute*. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-U.S.-refugees-successes-and-challenges>
5. Halpern, P. (2008). *Refugee economic self-sufficiency: An exploratory study of approaches used in Office of Refugee Resettlement Programs*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/refugee-economic-self-sufficiency-exploratory-study-approaches-used-office-refugee-resettlement-0>

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to the Voluntary Resettlement Agency staff for their participation in this study and their ongoing support in exploring effective services for newcomers within the United States, which will ensure self-sufficiency and independence, ultimately leading to impactful contributions to society.