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## CHALLENGES FACING YEMEN REFUGEE WOMEN IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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**Abstract.** Forced migration is associated with several challenges. The challenges that refugee women faced in their host countries were numerous. There has been a gender bias in Ethiopian literature on refugees. Refugees are homogenized in the existing studies. The gender differences among refugees have an impact on the challenges of forced migration that they encounter and how they handle them. Moreover, no study has been done on the adaptation challenges faced by Yemeni refugee women in Addis Ababa. This study's main objective was to examine the challenges that Yemeni refugee women faced in Addis Ababa. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was employed to achieve that objective. Thirteen Yemeni refugee women were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide to understand their experiences. Purposive sampling was used to choose study participants. The data was analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis procedures. The study's findings revealed that refugee women encountered several challenges that were detrimental to their well-being, including language difficulties, limited income and job opportunities, unrecognized identity papers and price increases, and housing problems. Furthermore, refugee women faced social isolation and sexual harassment. The study concluded that the challenges that Yemeni refugee women faced in Addis Ababa had an enormous impact on their well-being, which demands immediate intervention.

**Keywords:** Addis Ababa, challenges, Ethiopia, refugee women, Yemeni.

**Abbreviations:** Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS); Refugee and Return Services (RRS); Administration for Refugee and Return Affairs (ARRA); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

**Rezumat.** Migrația forțată este asociată cu mai multe provocări. Provocările cu care s-au confruntat femeile refugiate în țările lor gazdă au fost numeroase. A existat o părtinire de gen în literatura etiopiană despre refugiați. Refugiații sunt omogenizați în studiile existente. Diferențele de gen între refugiați au un impact asupra provocărilor migrației forțate cu care se confruntă și asupra modului în care le gestionează. În plus, nu a fost realizat niciun studiu privind provocările de adaptare cu care se confruntă femeile refugiate yemenite din Addis Abeba. Obiectivul principal al acestui studiu a fost să examineze provocările cu care s-au

confruntat femeile refugiate yemenite în Addis Abeba. Pentru atingerea acestui obiectiv a fost folosită o analiză fenomenologică interpretativă. Treisprezece femei refugiate yemenite au fost intervievate folosind un ghid de interviu semistructurat pentru a le înțelege experiențele. Eșantionarea intenționată a fost utilizată pentru a alege participanții la studiu. Datele au fost analizate folosind proceduri interpretative de analiză fenomenologică. Concluziile studiului au arătat că femeile refugiate s-au confruntat cu mai multe provocări care au fost dăunătoare pentru bunăstarea lor, inclusiv dificultăți lingvistice, venituri limitate și oportunități de muncă, acte de identitate nerecunoscute și creșteri ale prețurilor și probleme cu locuința. În plus, femeile refugiate s-au confruntat cu izolarea socială și hărțuirea sexuală. Studiul a concluzionat că provocările cu care s-au confruntat femeile refugiate yemenite în Addis Abeba au avut un impact enorm asupra bunăstării lor, ceea ce necesită intervenție imediată.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *Addis Abeba, provocări, Etiopia, femei refugiate, yemenite.*

**Abrevieri:** *Serviciul Iezuit pentru Refugiați (IRS); Servicii pentru refugiați și returnare (RRS); Administrația pentru Afaceri privind Refugiați și Repatriere (ARRA); Înaltul Comisar al Națiunilor Unite pentru Refugiați (UNHCR).*

## 1. Introduction

International migrants reached a total of 281 million worldwide in 2020, and nearly 50% of the migrants in this group were women [1]. By the end of 2022, 108.4 million individuals were persuaded to leave their homes due to intimidation, hostilities, or abuses of human rights, and 35.3 million of them were refugees [2]. Fifty-one percent of all refugees are women and girls [2]. The 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defined a refugee as: "A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" [3, p.14].

Seventy-six percent of refugees worldwide were found in low- and middle-income countries, and 52% of them were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine (6.5 million, 5.7 million, and 5.7 million, respectively) [2]. The top five countries receiving refugees by the end of 2022 were Turkey (3.6 million), Iran (3.4 million), Colombia (2.5 million), Germany (2.1 million), and Pakistan (1.7 million) [2]. Africa is both a source of refugees and a destination for them. In 2022, seven million refugees resided in Sub-Saharan Africa, and in particular, 4.7 million refugees resided in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region [2].

Refugees have long been welcomed and hosted in Ethiopia [4]. The country maintains a policy of opening doors for incoming refugees and providing humanitarian assistance for them [5]. Ethiopia is a party to both the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 Organization for African Union (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa(5). Based on these regional and global refugee conventions, Ethiopia ratified a national refugee proclamation in 2004 [4]. The Ethiopian government amended its refugee proclamation in 2019 [5]. This was done to create an enabling legal environment.

Ethiopia is Africa's third-largest host country for refugees, and as of May 2023, Ethiopia hosted 916,436 refugees and asylum seekers, with the majority of them coming from South

Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea [6]. Fifty-three percent of Ethiopia's overall population of refugees and asylum seekers is female (6). In 2023, most refugees in Ethiopia were hosted in camps [7]. However, there are also urban areas where refugees reside. The capital of the country, Addis Ababa, is home to 74,353 urban refugees, and women make up about 55% of the urban refugee population [8].

Refugees and asylum seekers of many nationalities reside in Addis Ababa. Yemenis are one of the groups [8]. Fighting between Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government triggered the start of the civil war in Yemen in 2015 [9]. Due to the civil war, about 6 million people were compelled to leave their homes [9]. Yemenis applied for refugee status in several countries, including Ethiopia. Following nationality screening processes and registration, Ethiopia's government recognizes Yemenis as *prima facie* refugees [10].

Forced migration is associated with several challenges. Before, during, and after their migration, refugee women experienced challenges. However, the post-migration challenges were the study's main focus. Refugee women experience higher levels of insecurity than refugee men do in their host countries [11]. Although all refugees confront violations of their human rights when they are in exile, refugee women are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence [12]. Several studies have been conducted on refugee women's post-migration challenges in developed countries [13-20]. The studies revealed that refugee women face a range of challenges, including social isolation, financial instability, unemployment, and acculturative stress. A qualitative study on refugee women in Sweden indicated that during the resettlement process, refugee women experienced social isolation, psychological problems, and physical health problems. Refugee women also felt pressured to accomplish something worthwhile [15]. Raising children, dealing with discrimination, and feeling isolated were all issues that Congolese refugee women in the United States dealt with on a social and cultural level [19]. Another study further indicated that refugee women in Australia faced challenges including social isolation, economic difficulty, a sense of helplessness, and distress [20].

Studies on the challenges that refugee women encounter in countries with low- and middle-income countries have been conducted [21-26]. The studies showed that refugee women experienced economic hardship, sexual assault, and social isolation. Refugee women in the Republic of South Africa experienced sexual assault and economic insecurity [22]. A qualitative study on Ethiopian refugee women in Uganda indicated that refugee women faced four causes of concern, including concerns between refugees and the local community, abuse by camp staff, intercultural conflicts, and difficulty accessing healthcare [25].

There have been few studies showing the adaptation challenges that refugees face in Ethiopia [27,28]. These studies indicated that refugees lacked social networks and were unable to acquire employment. The challenges that refugees faced in Ethiopia were additionally examined in gray literature, which revealed that refugee women had trouble speaking the local language and had limited access to job prospects [29-31]. But there has been a gender bias in Ethiopian literature on refugees. Refugees are homogenized in the existing studies. The gender differences among refugees have an impact on the challenges of forced migration that they encounter and how they handle them. Women's experiences were commonly neglected in the examination of refugees, even though both men and women were involved [32]. There are, however, a few studies in the gray literature that focus on the challenges that refugee women have in integrating, such as those of Eritrean refugees [33] and refugees from the Great Lakes region [34].

Furthermore, prior studies only offered a limited understanding of the challenges that Yemeni refugee women face in their host countries. Refugee women with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds from their host countries, such as Yemeni refugee women, may experience unique adaptation challenges. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, although there are many Yemeni refugees in Addis Ababa, no study has been done on the adaptation challenges faced by Yemeni refugee women. Following Eritreans, Yemeni refugees are the second-largest urban refugee group in Addis Ababa [8]. Therefore, the study aimed to examine the challenges that Yemeni refugee women faced in Addis Ababa. A study on this issue would help the concerned body design intervention programs that facilitate the adaptation processes of Yemeni refugee women.

## **2. Material and Methods**

### **2.1. Study design**

A qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis was employed among Yemeni refugee women who were residing in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meanings that people provide to their experiences are explored and understood in qualitative research [35]. A qualitative research design is preferred because it is important, particularly when working with marginalized groups such as refugees [36]. Through a process of reflective inquiry, interpretive phenomenological analysis illuminates what a lived experience means to the individual [37]. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was chosen for this study because it allows researchers to uncover and interpret the meaning of study participants' lived experiences, such as those of refugee women [38, 39]. Thus, it is the best research approach for eliciting the experiences of adaptation challenges faced by Yemeni refugee women in Addis Ababa.

### **2.2. Study setting**

Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia and acts as Africa's diplomatic center [40]. Since it lies in the center of the country, a melting pot of people from all backgrounds can be found in Addis Ababa [41]. More than 5.4 million people are predicted to live in Addis Ababa by 2023, making it one of Ethiopia's most populous cities [42]. Every year, a number of people from rural areas migrate to the city in quest of better job opportunities [40]. Refugees from various nationalities also moved to Addis Ababa. Among the urban refugee population, Eritreans made up the majority of Addis Ababa's refugees, followed by Yemenis, Somalis, Congolese, and other nationalities [8]. In 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR), report indicated that 2448 Yemeni refugees resided in Addis Ababa [8].

### **2.3. Participants and sampling**

Refugee women were participants in the study. To recruit refugee women, we worked with an organization working with refugees. We contacted Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), a humanitarian organization working with refugees. The organization gave us the phone numbers of Yemeni refugee community representatives. We contacted three Yemeni refugee community representatives. All participants were recruited with the help of these Yemeni refugee community representatives. Potential participants were identified by Yemeni refugee community representatives, and we contacted them via phone. For refugee women who meet the study's requirements, the study's objective was described, and they were invited to participate at a time convenient to them. Refugee women were selected purposefully. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who experienced the challenges in Addis Ababa.

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to determining sample size for different qualitative approaches [43]. We initially approached sixteen participants to take part in the study. Two refugee women declined to participate due to their expectation that the semi-structured interview would be emotionally challenging. An information sheet was provided to fourteen participants. Of which one dropped out because she was not interested. We included a total of thirteen participants. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being Yemeni refugee women; (2) living in Addis Ababa; (3) arriving in Ethiopia as a forced migrant at least for one year; (4) being aged 18 years and above; (5) being eager to take part in the study; and (6) having the ability to communicate Arabic. Specifying the minimum time since arrival helped ensure participants could share their experiences with adaptation challenges. We found no new data after interviewing thirteen participants.

#### **2.4. Instrument**

A structured interview was developed to collect data about the demographic characteristics of participants. The structured interview guide consisted of seven items that inquired about age, marital status, the highest level of education, length of stay, number of children, if any, and whether or not they had jobs in their country of origin and host country. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to inquire about participants' experiences of adaptation challenges they faced in Addis Ababa. The interview guide made participants talk about their challenges. We chose a semi-structured interview because it would generate rich data and allow us to gain insights into the adaptation challenges of participants. Items of the instrument were reviewed by experts who knew refugee adaptation challenges and those who had experience with semi-structured interview development. Based on the reviewers' comments, we modified a few items that lacked clarity for the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the Arabic language, which is the mother tongue of all participants. This required the recruitment of an interviewer who spoke the participants' language and English fluently. Furthermore, the study took into consideration the possible sensitivity of some refugee women to talking to a male interviewer. Hence, one bilingual, master's-level female interviewer in her 20s who knew how to conduct qualitative research, particularly interviews, was recruited.

#### **2.5. Data collection procedure**

A female interviewer conducted a face-to-face, semi-structured interview. We played the role of facilitator while the interviewer was conducting the interview. Moreover, we supervised participant recruitment and the interview. We gave the interviewer one-day training about the objectives of the study, the initial items of the semi-structured interview and probing questions, how to familiarize herself with participants, and the study's ethical considerations. Eleven participants were interviewed in their homes. Two of them were interviewed in a well-ventilated private room in JRS.

Ten participants were interviewed once, while three participants were interviewed twice to achieve the depth of the data. Each interview lasted between an hour and two hours. Each participant was given 5 dollars for their transportation and to thank them for their time spent with the interviewer. Data collection took place from July 5 to September 1, 2022. Given the sensitivity of the issue raised in the interview and the possibility of participants becoming distressed either in the middle or at the end of the interview, referral systems were put in place with a counselor at Addis Ababa University Guidance and Counseling Center. However,

during the whole data collection period, no participant was referred to a counselor. The one who interviewed participants transcribed and translated the data.

## **2.6. Data analysis**

The data analysis placed a strong emphasis on understanding the essence of the experiences of research participants, in keeping with the tradition of phenomenological research. The steps developed by Smith et al. (2009) [37] were used to guide the data analysis. Reading and rereading was the first step. We repeatedly read a single transcript to become completely familiar with the data. Initial note-taking was done in the second step. We made initial notes in the transcript's margin when we read a single transcript. The development of emergent themes was the third step. Data about the initial transcript observations were categorized. The fourth step was looking for connections among various emerging themes. Moving to the next transcript was the fifth step. After bracketing the prior transcript, we looked at the subsequent transcript with fresh eyes. For each transcript, we completed the first four steps before proceeding to the next step of the analysis. Finding patterns across transcripts was the sixth step. We analyzed thematic patterns in all transcripts. Based on the hierarchy, superordinate and constituent themes were developed. Moving the interpretation to a deeper level was the final stage. We looked at the recurring themes in the transcripts and made an effort to understand the meaning of the study participants' experiences. Based on the developed hierarchy, the data was presented. Direct quotations extracted from the transcript were presented to illustrate how participants experience the phenomenon.

Reflexivity was ensured through regular discussion among all authors. Given that the principal author had little experience conducting interpretive phenomenological analysis, the senior authors (MA and AM) combined their experiences with the leading author and assisted the leading author in the analysis stage.

## **2.7. Ethics approval and Informed consent**

We submitted the study protocol to the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers, and Anthropologists Institutional Review Board (ESSWA's IRB) for review. We got the ethical clearance approval of ESSWA's IRB to pursue our study with protocol number 010/2022. Before conducting a semi-structured interview, the interviewer provided a written information sheet to participants who could read it. The interviewer described the contents of the information sheet orally to those respondents who could not read. All respondents gave oral informed consent to the interviewer regarding their participation after the objective of the study and the information sheet had been fully described. We chose oral informed consent over written informed consent because we felt oral informed consent would enable participants to speak freely about their experiences. Participants may be reluctant to put their signatures on paper due to the socio-political circumstances of the country.

Respondents received notice that they were free to terminate the interview process at any moment of their choice and refuse to respond to any items of the semi-structured interview. Participants were informed that the research presented no danger or risk to them. Moreover, participants' names were not used to maintain confidentiality. Instead, a pseudonym was used. Participants also gave oral consent to the recording of data and publication of their anonymized responses. An audio recorder (a Sony digital tape recorder, PX470) was used to efficiently capture the semi-structured interviews. As per the requirements for data protection, the recorded tapes were properly kept. The data we collected from all participants in the study were kept anonymous. Confidentiality was assured

throughout the data collection process. In general, we followed the Declaration of Helsinki when conducting the study.

### **2.8. Trustworthiness of the data**

Consensus about what constitutes a high-quality qualitative study is somewhat difficult [43]. However, the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is established through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability [44, 45]. Different verification strategies were used throughout the research process to ensure rigor. Credibility was ensured through extended engagement with participants, member checking, and epoche, or bracketing. The participants were allowed to comment immediately on the interviewer's verbal summary of the transcripts' accuracy. To record the participants' actual experiences, the interviewer spent an extensive amount of time getting to know them. To minimize bias throughout the data collection and analysis stages, we also made our assumptions clear. To comprehend contextual aspects and guarantee transferability, the interviewer gathered thick descriptive data. To ensure dependability, the authors described the processes within the study in great detail. To provide confirmability, an audit trail was established for the data gathering and analysis processes. We also maintained a study record throughout the entire study (a research log) to ensure confirmability.

## **3. Findings**

### **3.1. Demographic characteristics of participants**

Thirteen refugee women were selected, aged between 30 and 60. At the time of the interview, study participants had been residing in Addis Ababa for between three and a half and ten years. Among the participants in the study, four were unmarried, three were married, three were divorced, and two were widowed. Eight participants had at least one child and at most four children, and the rest did not. Among the participants who had children, seven were single mothers. One was illiterate; one completed primary school; two hadn't completed their secondary school; four participants had completed secondary school; and five had completed tertiary education and graduated in their homeland. Among the thirteen participants, six were unemployed in their origin country, and seven were employed. During the time of the interview, seven participants were engaged in either skilled or semi-skilled employment, and the rest were unemployed.

### **3.2. Challenges**

While they were living in Addis Ababa, Yemeni refugee women faced numerous adaptation challenges. The adaptation challenges that refugee women faced were interrelated. Not a single adaptation challenge affected the well-being of refugee women, but rather the interplay (interaction) of several adaptation challenges. The presence of one challenge compounded the other. Each challenge didn't hit each respondent equally. The major adaptation challenges encountered by refugee women were presented as follows.

### **3.3. Language difficulty**

Life was not easy for refugee women to handle in the first three years of settlement because they did not know Amharic, which is the official language of the country. Some refugee women faced a lot of troubles in several areas like shopping, transportation, health centers, educational settings, and navigating the city during the initial period. For instance, Fatim did not know the Amharic language during the initial period. As a result, she was unable to communicate while she was using transport services and shopping. Fatim described that language difficulty was a severe challenge for her because she couldn't know the culture and

the rules of the country due to difficulty in knowing the language of the local community. Participants also faced language difficulties when they went to health centers to seek health services. For example, Aisha went to one of the government healthcare centers in Addis Ababa when she got sick. As she couldn't speak the language, Aisha was unable to describe her illness to the doctor properly. She narrated her story as follows:

Once upon a time, I got sick and went to the government health center. Then the doctor asked me to tell him what made me sick, how could I tell him that I was feeling nausea? It was very difficult for me to describe this word. I didn't know how to describe it. Then I showed him through body language. Then the doctor understood me.

Most of the refugee women stayed in the city for a few more years and learned a few Amharic words, which made it easier for them to communicate with the locals and helped them somewhat overcome challenges brought on by linguistic barriers. For instance, Aisha has overcome some of the difficulties she faced during the initial period after she began learning Amharic. Conversely, participants including Badia, Halima, Afina, and Leila still struggle to interact with the locals using Amharic despite having lived in the city for more than three years. These participants' daily lives were profoundly impacted by the ongoing language difficulty. For example, because of language difficulty, refugee women's social interactions with the local community were still limited. Halima could not communicate with the local community using the Amharic language, which inhibited her social interaction.

The language difficulty created further challenges for refugee women's job opportunities and income. This means language difficulty exacerbates the limited job opportunities and income. Halima couldn't get the job she was interested in Addis Ababa in the formal sector due to a language barrier. Even the jobs she had gotten required her to be fluent in Amharic.

### **3.4. Limited job opportunities and income**

All participants complained about the lack of job opportunities in Addis Ababa. Of course, many young Ethiopian nationals were unemployed due to limited job opportunities in Ethiopia. Unlike those Ethiopian nationals, what was different for refugee women was that their chance to compete and hire in the formal sector was limited because of different factors, including a lack of a work permit, language difficulty, and a refugee identity paper. This made refugee women more disadvantaged than Ethiopian nationals.

Regardless of their educational qualifications, refugee women's job opportunities were limited. There were refugee women who did have the necessary educational backgrounds and work experience in their home country. Refugee women like Badia, Fatim, Afina, Leila, and Halima completed at least their undergraduate education in their homeland. But their chances of getting a job in the formal sector were limited in Addis Ababa. For instance, Halima applied for several job positions when organizations posted vacancy announcements. Nevertheless, no employer called her for an interview simply because of her refugee identity card. She reported:

For the last four and a half years, I didn't get a job. I applied for vacancy announcements in different private and government banks since it is my area of specialization. I also went to several schools to teach Arabic. However, employers did not call me for an interview or further processing. They chose Ethiopians instead of me. They didn't choose me because I'm a refugee.

The limited job opportunities made Halima, Cally, Kalah, Emani, and Leila idle. Halima reported that since she didn't have a job, the only thing she did was eat and then sleep. Sitting



at home without a job affected refugee women's mental well-being. Being idle and worried about different issues can become the source of different psychological problems. Refugee women who didn't have jobs at the time of the interview stated that they experienced psychological problems in different forms. The most common psychological problems were stress and a feeling of hopelessness. These psychological problems were more prevalent, especially for some early adult refugee women and those refugee women who had a job in their homeland. For example, Halima had worked as a customer officer, supervisor, and training specialist in the bank before she came to Addis Ababa. When she came to this country, she became unemployed. Given her age and having a job in her home country, being unemployed in this country caused her depression. She stated:

I want to work. I don't want to stay at home because I'm unemployed. At this time, given my age, it is terrible to stay at home without work. Previously, I worked in different positions in the bank in my country. I didn't come here to stay at home. It gives me depression. I want to work and support myself, my family, and other people.

The limited job opportunities resulted in limited income. Some refugee women couldn't make money and help themselves and their families due to limited job opportunities. Because of a lack of income, some refugee women sometimes encountered financial troubles paying for transportation and buying sanitary pads. Some of the refugee women were also unable to fulfill their basic needs, like clothing and food. Respondents like Cally came to Addis Ababa with nothing because of the war. She only had two changes of clothes. In this country, she couldn't buy clothes and shoes as they were running out. The same is true for Kalah. She said that "When I was in Yemen, I didn't worry about running out of clothes. Because I used to buy clothes and shoes immediately. But after coming here, I was unable to buy clothes and shoes, even though they were becoming scarce".

Some refugee women also faced inadequate food in Addis Ababa. Fatime described that she and her family spent days in Addis Ababa, eating one day and not eating some other days. In a similar vein, Emani reported the days in which she had nothing to eat in her home and couldn't find a person who took care of the food. She described:

I have faced many challenges in this country. I felt hungry in this country. I know there are days when I drink sugar solution only and I sleep in an empty house (she is crying). We had our own home and everything to eat in Yemen. But we came to this country because we could not live in a war. There is no one to help you. If you are on the verge of dying, no one will look up to you. My son and I were not given any food by the landlady while she was watching us. We had nothing to lick or taste during that time.

The lack of income affected the psychological well-being of refugee women negatively. Emani described that "the thoughts about my economic life itself are on the verge of killing me". The limited income also affected refugee women's social interaction. Having limited income forced refugee women not to establish relationships with friends and have get-togethers with their friends. For example, Cally did not show interest in meeting her friends or making new relationships with others due to her limited income. Cally reported:

It is very difficult to meet people when I have little money in my hand. I will not have an interest in meeting with someone. I feel ashamed to meet someone without having money in my hand. I feel bad since I had money before. I see my soul so low, and I'm ashamed. It's hard to beg because I didn't do this before.

On some occasions, refugee women got job opportunities in the formal sector based on their informal social networks. Some refugee women worked in hairdressing and beauty

salons, supermarkets, garment factories, and private schools. However, these jobs do have their limitations. For one thing, refugee women did these jobs for a temporary period. It's kind of on and off. When the job came, they made little money; when it went, they became jobless. They were not permanent jobs.

The second thing is that employers did not pay refugee women like Ethiopians for the same type of job just because of their refugee identity cards. This hurt refugee women's interest in working and later influenced their decision to leave the job. For instance, Cally was employed in one of the hairdressing and beauty salons in Addis Ababa. By doing this job, she used to earn money and lead her family. The employer paid her less money compared to an Ethiopian national just because she had a refugee identity card. In addition to the low payment compared to Ethiopian nationals, she reported that this type of work exposed her to adverse health effects. She stood and worked this job for a long period without rest every day. As a result, she was vulnerable to physical illness. After working there for some time, she decided to quit the job.

### **3.5. Unrecognized Identity Paper and Associated Challenges**

In Ethiopia, it's the Refugee and Return Services (RRS), previously called the Administration for Refugee and Return Affairs (ARRA), that gives identity papers to recognized refugees. The refugee identity card is supposed to serve several purposes for the cardholder. However, in reality, some respondents stated that the identity papers they held didn't serve their intended purposes. To get some services, refugee women were asked to show their identity papers by some organizations. However, when refugees show their identity papers, they are not recognized by them. Consequently, respondents couldn't access the services they needed.

The new refugee proclamation entitled refugees to access banking and telecommunication services under articles 33 and 34, respectively [46]. Despite the law providing them the right to have banking and telecommunication services using their refugee identity papers, some refugee women couldn't access these services. Refugee women like Badia and Halima faced the unacceptability of their identity papers when they went to access banking services. As a result, they were unable to open a bank account, transfer, deposit, withdraw money, or use other banking services. Badia described:

Two weeks ago, I went to the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia to open an account to transfer the house rent. They said that you can't open an account using this ID. Then I went to Awash Bank, and they said the same thing. I went to the authorization office, and they said no. When they read our ID anywhere, they said that we couldn't accept it.

The lack of recognition of refugee women's identity cards excludes them from government-subsidized goods and services. Respondents like Nahir, Kalah, Abia, and Aisha described that employees working in woreda (it is an administrative level that is found below a sub-city in Addis Ababa city) did not accept their identity cards when they tried to issue ration coupons. Woreda gives its residents a ration coupon (a voucher entitling the holder to access a discount on basic commodities from association shops). To get this coupon from the woreda, one has to hold an Addis Ababa city identity card. A woreda works with association shops to give residents basic subsidized goods like sugar, oil, and flour at a reasonable price. When refugee women went to the woreda and requested that they issue ration coupons, employees working in the woreda denied them. Since refugee women could not access basic goods from association shops at fair prices, they were forced to buy these basic goods with

expensive money from the shops. Given the limited financial capacity of refugee women, purchasing basic goods at an expensive price created another financial burden for them. For instance, Nahir stated:

Because I always pay a lot of money to buy sugar in a shop, I wondered one day why I hadn't just gone to woreda and asked for a coupon. I then went to the woreda and asked for a coupon. They informed me that I was unable to obtain a coupon with my refugee identification card. I made an effort to persuade them. They couldn't understand me, though.

The identity card also restricted refugee women's mobility. Respondents mentioned that they were not allowed to go outside of their residence (Addis Ababa) unless they got a permission letter from the office of RRS. RRS gave them an identity card based on their choice of city residence. The police will arrest them if they move outside Addis Ababa and nearby towns without permission. According to respondents, this law restricted their freedom of movement. Due to this reason, refugee women expressed their dissatisfaction. For example, Abia stated:

We cannot go to another city whenever we want. We have to bring a permission (pass) letter from ARRA. If something goes wrong and my friends call me, I can't go to them unless I get a moving permit from ARRA. This means that I am not available for my friends when they need me.

The lack of recognition of refugee women's identity papers increased their vulnerability to social exclusion. Because of the unacceptability of their identity card by some organizations and the local community, Badia and Leila did not feel a sense of belonging. But rather, they felt that they were alienated from the local community.

### **3.6. Increase in prices in relation to identity**

The increment in prices of goods and services associated with inflation is normal for refugees. However, when this increment targeted only refugee women, it became problematic. We found that sellers and profit-making service-provider organizations increase the price of goods and services for Yemeni refugee women, which causes them difficulty in accessing essential goods and services. Participants repeatedly indicated the areas where they faced an increase in prices. These include shopping, restaurants, and transportation.

Respondents stated that whenever they and one of the local community members enter a shop, sellers do not tell both of them the same price. Sellers add to the price, particularly for refugee women. About restaurants, participants reported that when they went to a restaurant, employees working in the restaurant changed the price of the menu for them.

Concerning transportation, refugee women repeatedly faced an increment in tariffs on transport services that targeted only them. Especially if refugee women entered a taxi carrying some items, they were asked to pay a lot of money for them. Driver assistants requested that they pay an extra amount of money on several occasions. Refugee women were forced to pay what was requested since they didn't know the tariff during the initial periods of settlement. Nahir repeatedly faced an increment in transport tariffs while she went from place to place using a taxi. She raised one incident and described it in the following manner:

When I was going from the Megegnagna neighborhood to the Bole Arabssa neighborhood, the driver assistant charged other passengers 17 birrs, but he charged me 20 birrs. When I asked him why? He told me that he should have charged me in dollars, not in birrs.

Some factors made refugee women vulnerable to increases in the price of goods and services. The first factor that exposed refugee women to the increase in goods and services was their skin color. Since most Yemeni refugee women's skin color is light, sellers could easily identify that they were not Ethiopians. Consequently, some sellers increased the price of goods and services. Aisha described that "our appearance or skin color exposes us to being known by people. They see our skin color and say that these are Arabs or Diaspora people who have money".

There are refugee women whose skin color looks Ethiopian (e.g., Halima, Marya, Cally, Kalah, and Iman). Most of these refugee women have Ethiopian decedents, usually their mothers. Some of these refugee women struggled to speak Amharic (Halima and Iman), while others could speak at the time of the interview (Marya, Cally, Kalah, and Iman). Those refugee women whose skin color was Ethiopian and who could speak Amharic were less vulnerable to price increases than those who struggled to speak Amharic. Those refugee women whose skin color is the same as Ethiopians are usually born and raised in Yemen. For instance, Halima's skin color resembles most Ethiopians' skin colors. However, she was unable to communicate with sellers properly using Amharic. Understanding this, sellers increased the price of goods and services for her many times. She said:

When I went to shops, the sellers thought that I was Ethiopian. I seem just like an Ethiopian in terms of skin color. When I started to speak, they realized that I'm not Ethiopian. They started to cheat me. If the price of something is 100 birr, they asked me to pay 1000 birr.

Dressing style was a second factor that made refugee women vulnerable to an increment in price. Sometimes, when refugee women go to a shop or other marketplace wearing an Abaya (a full-length dress worn by Muslim women), sellers increase the price of goods and services. As per participants, sellers could identify Abaya as coming from Middle Eastern countries. Those Yemenis who dressed in Abaya but were able to speak the language were fortunate. They communicated with sellers in Amharic and purchased the things at the correct price.

### **3.7. Housing problem**

All respondents reported that the housing problem was the most severe challenge that they faced in Addis Ababa. The cost of house rent is extremely difficult for refugee women. The lack of affordable housing increased refugee women's vulnerability to financial hardship. Just because of the high cost of house rent, refugee women were forced to reside in poor housing conditions, like small, crowded, and poorly equipped houses.

Increasing the house rent may be a problem for most city residents. However, for refugee women, the situation is worse. The housing problem is compounded for refugee women because it is associated with limited job opportunities and income and with their refugee status. Refugee women faced intersections between limited job opportunities, income, and refugee status, which exacerbated refugee women's housing problems.

Based on the type of houses in which they resided, we categorized refugee women into two groups: condominium houses and compound houses. The first group included refugee women who rented condominium houses on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. Except for Aisha, who lived in a condominium house downtown, respondents like Cally, Fatim, Kalah, Leila, and Nahir were included in this category.

Some challenges refugee women faced when renting condominium houses. The first challenge was that the house lords/ladies did not keep the contract and increased the house

rent unreasonably. For condominium houses, there is a contractual agreement that has to be made between the house lord or lady and the tenant. The landlord or lady and the tenant sign for a certain time, usually 6 months or a year. When the tenant wants to continue, he/she is expected to renew the contract every specified period. The Addis Ababa city administration passed a regulation that banned an increase in residential home rent for six months at the time of data collection. However, some house lords/ladies were not abiding by the contract and the city administration's regulations and increased the rent. Refugee women were told by the landowners or ladies that they could leave their homes if they didn't pay the requested rent. Since refugee women couldn't afford the required money, they were forced to change the houses they resided in and were looking for another house. Their tenure in one house became very short. This created a huge problem for refugee women. Nahir narrated as follows:

The most severe challenge is house rent. Before I finished the contract, house renter told me I had to increase the price. I said I didn't finish the contract, and the house renter said no. Due to this reason, I changed the house four times. In our country, with or without a contract, some people can rent houses. When the situation becomes difficult, the government announces that no one can increase the rent. In this country, despite the government's passing the regulation that bans an increment in house rent fees, landlords and ladies were not abide to this regulation.

House lords/ladies increased the price of house rent not only for the already existing tenants but also for potential refugee women who would like to rent houses. House lords/ladies looked at refugee women's skin color, and when they understood that they were not Ethiopians, they told them an inflated price. According to respondents, some house lords/ladies considered them foreigners who could pay the required money. This is associated with the belief that Yemeni refugees were rich. As a result, house lords/ladies increased house rent unreasonably every time for those refugee women who rented their houses and for potential tenants. Aisha wanted to change her previous house and asked the landlord to rent it. The landlord asked her to pay twice the previously rented money. She said:

As a refugee, when I tried to rent a house, house renters increased the price. What happened to me recently was that the house I wanted to rent was being rented for 5,000 birrs. However, the landlord informed me that the rent for this house is 10,000 birrs because I am an Arab. I asked him to rent me 6,000 birrs. But he refused. I gave up renting this house for this amount of money and turned my face to rent another house.

The second challenge was the advance payment. When refugee women were forced to leave the houses in which they resided due to an unreasonable increase in price, they looked for another house to rent. In their attempt to rent a house, they faced another challenge: the advance payment. Especially for refugee women who have children, this situation worsens. For instance, the house lord increased the price of the house on Cally. As a result, she was forced to change houses. When she wanted to rent another house, she was asked to pay three months advance payment by the landlord. Given how jobless she was, it was difficult for her to pay the three-month advance payment. She said:

As a refugee, being homeless is very difficult. I went to the Bole Arabsa neighborhood and wanted to rent a condominium house. The house lord asked me to pay him three months in advance. I don't have a job. Where can I get this money from? On top of

that, I'm expected to pay money to the broker. Where can all this money come from? It's difficult.

The second group included refugee women who lived in compound houses in marginal parts of the city. Except for participants who lived in condominium houses, the rest of the respondents resided in compound houses. Refugee women who couldn't afford to rent condominium houses live in compound houses. Due to the constant increase in house rent, refugee women live in crowded rooms. It's challenging, especially for refugee women with children, to live in a small room. Refugee women's housing conditions in Addis Ababa were very low compared to the house they used to live in. It was hard to accept this reality for refugee women. Iman was persuaded to live not only in a small house but also in poor housing conditions with dirty carpets, pest infestations, and a very cold temperature. She said:

If you look at my house, it looks like a cowshed; the floor is wet, and the roof is full of dirt. A house like this is never a house where people spend a single night. The toilet is next to me; it's very cold. I'm cleaning the floor at night to get rid of worms. Apart from that, we live in a small room with my children, which is very difficult.

In a compound house, the landlord/lady may have a number of rental homes. Tenants were permitted by landlords/ladies to rent houses. Refugee women make up one of the tenants. Within a compound, a large number of neighbors, including refugee women, are living together. While they were living in a compound house, respondents faced uncleanliness and long queues in the restrooms. Refugee women were sharing the same restroom with other neighbors. Given that they used to use personal restrooms in their country, sharing restrooms with other people became difficult for them. Usually, shared restrooms were not clean, and all renters were not responsible for cleaning the restroom. Besides this, respondents complained that there was a long queue to use the restroom, especially in the morning.

Refugee women faced rejection by landlords or ladies to rent their houses to big families in compound houses. Most landlords/ladies were not interested in renting their houses to large families. In relation to restrooms and the consumption of electricity and water, most landlords/ladies didn't rent their houses to large families of refugee women. This forced refugee woman like Leila to rent condominium house, even though it was expensive. Leila stated that "My family's size is seven. We can't rent a house in a compound because landlords don't want to rent to large families like us".

### **3.8. Social Isolation**

A refugee woman who came from a more collectivist culture like Yemen found it difficult to live in exile, separated from her family, relatives, and friends. Refugee women reported that they faced social isolation due to changes in culture and language. Consequently, they felt that they were isolated from their existing social ties. For instance, Halima missed not only her family but also her neighbor and friends. At times, she felt sad and alone.

Social networks were crucial in promoting the well-being of refugee women. Refugee women were unable to speak with their families in person. Refugee women lacked strong social networks to turn to when problems arose. They kept all their suffering inside themselves. All of their sadness was contained within them. Refugee women experienced loneliness as they lost the previous social network that provided them with comfort and safety.

According to respondents, the holidays made them feel even more lonely. For the respondents, celebrating a holiday while apart from one's family, friends, and relatives was not a holiday. The holiday was something they used to share with their friends, family, and neighbors. However, there was nothing like it in this country. They consequently felt awful. Leila stated that "When a holiday comes, I spend it feeling broken inside". Similarly, Aisha used to celebrate Ramadan together with her family, relatives, and friends in her homeland. When she came to Addis Ababa, she missed all these things. In this country, she did not cheerfully celebrate the holiday. Aisha reported:

I feel bad when Ramadan comes. It is not pleasant to celebrate a holiday outside your homeland. Sometimes I say that it is good if a holiday doesn't come because I used to celebrate Eid by buying a sheep, wearing new clothes, painting our hands, and buying cookies and chocolates. I cannot fulfill all these things in this country and celebrate Ramadan (she is crying). To some extent, I buy new clothes, chocolate, and juice for my kids during the holidays to keep them from getting sad.

### **3.9. Sexual harassment**

In Addis Ababa, refugee women faced sexual harassment by men in various areas, including on the street, in hospitals, and at work. Respondents stated that men didn't say a woman was young or old when they sexually harassed refugee women. Refugee women experienced incidents of sexual harassment while they went to the hospital to seek health services. Some male health professionals were sexually harassing refugee women when they went to them for medical treatment. As a result, respondents did not get medical treatment. For instance, Nahir disclosed her personal experiences, saying that "I went to a hospital when I was sick. When the doctor saw me, he saw me differently, and he harassed me. I told the doctor not to add another pain to my already painful life and left that hospital without getting treatment". While Nahir faced sexual harassment in the hospital, Aisha faced it in her workplace. Aisha experienced sexual harassment while she worked in Merkato (the largest marketplace in Africa). Some men approached her and offered to have a child with her. She said:

Many men at work harassed me. There are business owners who say that they want to marry me or spend one night with me. For example, when I ask them to rent a shop in Merkato, they say that if I am not for them, they will not rent the shop. Or if I slept with them for one night, they would fill the shop and give it to me.

Sexual harassment was exacerbated due to the refugee status of the respondents. The incidence of sexual harassment caused refugee women to experience negative psychological consequences, such as being overly suspicious and avoidant.

## **4. Discussion**

This qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis study examined the adaptation challenges Yemeni refugee women faced in Addis Ababa. The study's findings revealed that language difficulties pose many challenges for refugee women in a range of contexts, including transportation, healthcare settings, educational settings, and city navigation. The language difficulty negatively affected refugee women's social interaction with the local community, job opportunities, and income. Similarly, according to studies that have already been conducted [18,47-50], refugee women have language barriers in host countries. According to studies done in Ethiopia with Eritrean refugees [29] and refugee women from the Great Lakes Region [34], refugees had difficulties integrating with the local

community because of language barriers. This demonstrated the necessity of developing Amharic language learning programs for refugee women and providing interpretation services.

The study also indicated that refugee women faced limited job opportunities and income. Regardless of their educational backgrounds, refugee women had limited job opportunities. Limited employment opportunities led to limited earnings. Refugee women were unable to meet their basic needs because of their limited incomes. Refugee women had psychological as well as social problems as a result of their limited income. In a few instances, refugee women got temporary employment in the formal sector, and they received lower wages than Ethiopian citizens did. Similar to this study, other studies [20,22,51-53] found that refugee women had difficulty finding employment and earning money in host countries. Studies carried out in Ethiopia also showed that refugees had limited access to activities that generated income and were unable to acquire a means of subsistence [27,28]. Our study found that the lack of a work permit, language barriers, and a refugee identity paper all had an impact on employment opportunities for refugee women. Existing literature also confirmed that the limited job opportunities and income for refugee women could be attributed to language difficulty [47] and refugee status [54]. Enhancing refugee women's economic well-being is crucial through providing job trainings, giving refugee women access to small business loans, and giving refugee women a work permit.

Additionally, the study's findings showed that some organizations and individuals did not accept the identity cards of refugee women. They were unable to get services they needed as a result. In addition to excluding them from government-subsidized goods and services, the lack of recognition of refugee women's identity cards also restricts their movement. Furthermore, the unrecognized refugee identity card increased refugee women's feelings of isolation. The lack of acceptance of identity papers may be attributed to discrimination and a lack of significant relationships in the community [55]. Similarly to this, a study indicated that refugee women often experienced rejection from the community because of their identity papers [56]. This suggested that efforts should be made to teach the local community about the rights of refugees to increase acceptance and lessen discrimination. In addition, refugee women should receive legal assistance to remedy the problem with the unrecognized refugee identity card.

The study's findings additionally indicated that prices for refugee women had increased in areas like restaurants, shopping, and transportation due to their identity. Sellers and service-providing organizations commonly thought that Arabs (Yemeni refugees) were rich. Refugee women were more susceptible to price increases due to their skin color and clothing. In response to this, studies demonstrated that local communities discriminated against refugee women based on their identification [23,51,54]. Following intersectionality theory, refugee women were placed into various groups based on their status as refugees, the color of their skin, and their style of dressing in the host country [57]. These interrelated factors made Yemeni refugee women more susceptible to price increases. It was suggested that raising local communities awareness to end discriminatory practices and educating refugee women about how to report unfair price increment practices.

The study found that housing problems were a challenge for refugee women in Addis Ababa. Refugee women are unable to afford the cost of house rent. Refugee women were forced to live in poor housing conditions, such as cramped, small homes with inadequate amenities, just due to the high expense of rent. The intersections between limited job



opportunities, income, and refugee status exacerbated refugee women's housing problems. This study's findings are supported by studies carried out in the host countries [53,58-60], which found that refugee women had a housing problem. We recommended providing financial support to refugee women to enable them to rent houses that are secure, stable, and within their price range and drafting legislation to protect tenants from discrimination based on the color of their skin and status as refugees. Furthermore, giving refugee women greater job opportunities would help them acquire employment, which in turn would improve their housing conditions.

The study also found that refugee women faced social isolation. Being separated from family members, relatives, and friends caused refugee women to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. In line with our study, several studies indicated that refugee women faced social isolation in host countries [14-20,49,58]. Eritrean refugees residing in camps in Ethiopia faced a high degree of social isolation [28]. Participants in our study reported feeling socially isolated as a result of linguistic and cultural barriers. As evidence for this study, previous studies found that social isolation among refugee women in host countries was a result of cultural differences in customs and traditions [61], language barriers, and acculturative stress [62]. Therefore, it could be crucial for concerned bodies to develop integration programs, including providing local language and cultural orientation pieces of training and letting them participate in cultural programs.

Finally, the study's findings revealed that refugee women experienced sexual harassment by men in Addis Ababa, including on the street, in hospitals, and at places of work. Due to sexual harassment, refugee women encountered psychological problems like being overly suspicious and avoidant. In line with this study, existing studies indicated that refugee women faced sexual harassment both within and outside of refugee camps [22-25,61,63]. This suggested that efforts should be made to educate the local community about sexual harassment and assist refugee women in obtaining legal and psychosocial support.

## 5. Conclusion

Refugee women faced several challenges in Addis Ababa. Refugee women faced language difficulties, which negatively affected their social interaction with the local community, job opportunities, and income. Refugee women also faced limited job opportunities and income, which limited their ability to meet their basic needs and caused them to experience psychological and social problems. Moreover, refugee women faced a lack of recognition of their identity cards by some organizations and individuals and a price increase in relation to their identity. Refugee women found it difficult to pay their rent. Finally, refugee women faced social isolation and sexual harassment in Addis Ababa, which affected their psychological well-being. In general, the challenges that Yemeni refugee women faced in Addis Ababa had an enormous effect on their well-being which demands immediate intervention.

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