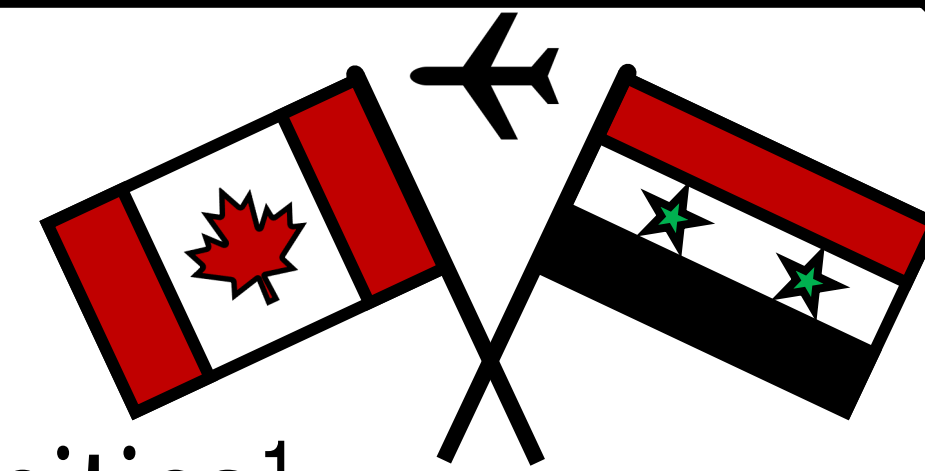


Abstract

This presentation discusses the ethical and logistical issues related to cultural differences that arose during an interview study with Syrian refugees and the steps taken to address them

Introduction

As of November 4th 2015, Canada has 44,620 Syrian refugees with over 350 welcoming communities¹



The first Syrian family arrived in Thunder Bay, Ontario on February 11th, 2016². Since then, there are at least 134 Syrian refugees in the city³

Our project:

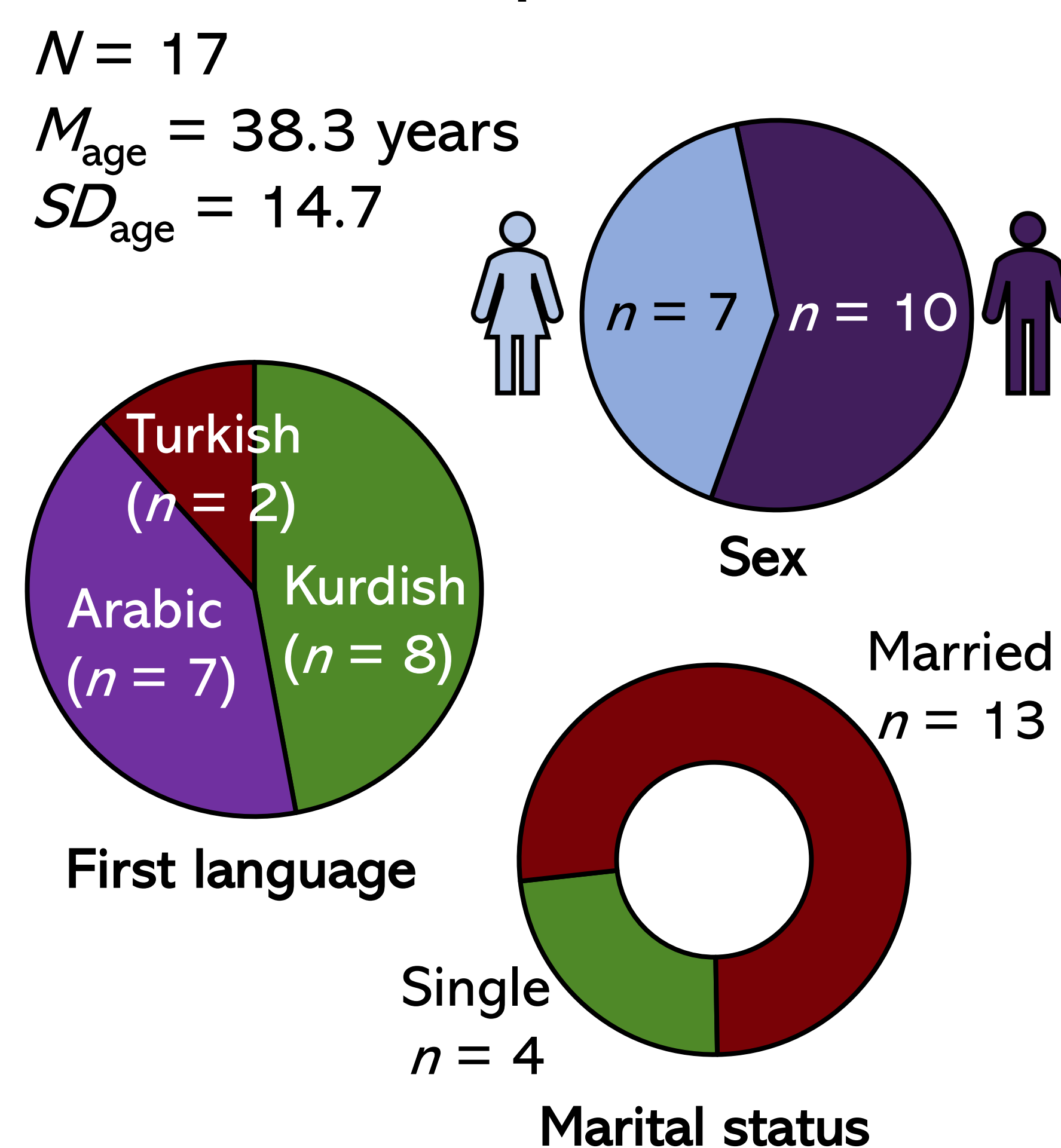
- ❖ *An interview study*
- ❖ *To learn about the resettlement experiences of the refugees in Thunder Bay*
- ❖ *Research protocols were developed with cultural and linguistic considerations*
- ❖ *Interviewer was Middle Eastern, spoke Arabic*
- ❖ *The researchers encountered several issues during the data collection phase*

Objective of current presentation:

To identify the culture-related issues that arose during data collection and the steps taken to resolve them

Method

Participants



Procedure

- ❖ Individual interview appointments booked with participants
- ❖ Interviews carried out in Arabic, the official language of Syria⁴
- ❖ Participants offered choice of interview locations:
 - Participant's home or in lab on campus
 - Transportation provided to those who need it to attend their interviews
- ❖ Gift card given as honorarium to each participant

Results

The table below shows the issues encountered during the interviews and the steps taken in the protocol amendment to address them

Issues encountered	Examples	Protocol amendment
1 Providing informed consent	Interviewee not understanding the need for informed consent	Took the time to explain the nature of psychological research, ethical requirements
2 Reading and signing consent forms	Interviewee unable to read and write	Reviewed consent forms orally; interviewee provided oral consent on interview recordings
3 Fluency in Arabic	Interviewee had limited vocabulary, trouble understanding or responding during interviews	Rephrased questions; enlisted family members to help with explanations or translations
4 Presence of non-participant family members during interview in home settings	Family members interrupted interviewees, answered the interview questions	Obtained informed consent from all present family members to participate in the study; relocated some interviews from home to lab setting to keep interview on a one-on-one basis
5 Understanding the purpose of gift cards (honorarium) post interview	Interviewee asked for multiple gift cards for other non-participant family members and friends	Provided extra gift cards
6 Confusion about the researchers' role	Treated researchers as their case workers; invited researchers to stay for dinner after interviews (cultural custom)	Graciously declined dinner invitations; clarified researchers' roles as different from case workers; directed interviewees to their case workers or appropriate resources for information or assistance

Summary (what we learned)

1. Some Syrian refugee participants may not be familiar with or understand:
 - ❖ the nature of psychological research
 - ❖ the concept of informed consent
 - ❖ role differences between researchers and case workers
 - ❖ professional boundaries with researchers
2. Middle Eastern customs might not be compatible with Western research ethics guidelines, e.g., presence of non-participant family members during the interview, family members speaking for the participant, inviting researchers to dinner, asking for research honorarium to be extended to non-participant family members
3. Some cultural flexibility might be needed in ethical guidelines for psychological research with Syrian refugees

References

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- ³ Government of Canada (2021). Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. *Map of destination communities and service provider organizations*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/welcome-syrian-refugees/destination-communities-map.html>
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