

THE EXPERIENCE OF MEANING AND PURPOSE IN LIFE AMONG ADULT IRAQI
REFUGEES IN JORDAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Reem Issa Abbasi

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

February, 2019

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2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to present a study that promotes understanding and exploration about how adult Iraqi refugees living in Jordan can still experience meaning making and hope in the face of suffering. The significance of this research lies in its unique findings that contribute to the body of literature concerning trauma recovery. A qualitative phenomenological in-depth interview methodology was used to explore the phenomenon of meaning in suffering among adult Iraqi refugees. The following research questions were used in this study to explore the phenomenon of meaning in suffering: Can life still be experienced as meaningful in the face of tragedy, grief, and suffering? If so, how do adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and hope in the wake of their suffering? Can anything positive emerge from suffering? A phenomenological approach using semistructured interviews with a number of adult Iraqi refugees allowed participants to describe their lived experiences through their own perspectives. Through semistructured interviews with participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon, the essence as well as the variations of the investigated phenomenon across participants can be understood. Participants' responses were recorded, transcribed, and repeatedly reread. The researcher looked for themes and patterns that emerge both within interviews and across the interviews. Findings indicate that the experience of meaning and purpose in life among participants include living in a safe environment and world, raising up a good generation, being men of good reputation and of influence, and respecting human freedom. The participants' final message was this: Good values are what matters most to live a life of fulfillment.

Keywords: trauma, refugee, Iraqi refugee, meaning, hope, suffering, phenomenology

Dedication

Throughout this long journey, I have found the Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to tread on the heights (Habakkuk 3:19). To Him I give all glory.

This study is dedicated to my husband, Hagob. Without your continuous support and encouragement, this project would have been impossible. I cannot express the gratitude that I feel to walk my life journey with such a faithful, supportive, and loving man. Next, this study is dedicated to my two precious sons, Avedis and Levon. Throughout this journey, you had to bear all the times when I had to be away from you. Your love, support, and prayers are so precious. I could not find a more precious gift to provide you and those who suffer in this world than the words of wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes: “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless’” (1:2, New International Version). “I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter” (4:1). “While I was still searching but not finding . . . This only have I found: God created mankind upright, but they have gone in search of many schemes” (7:28–29). “Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it” (8:16). “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (12:13–14).

Acknowledgments

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to my family and for my parents, Issa and Margarette, for their role in helping me to get to this place in my journey. Words cannot adequately express my thanks for a lifetime of love, sacrifice, and support during my travels. Next, I acknowledge the strength and courage of the participants who made this study possible. Their courage to share and provide their insight is very much appreciated. I also recognize the thoughtful support of my committee members, Dr. Sosin, Dr. Joy Mawen, and Dr. Denise Daniel. To Dr. Sosin, my chair, without your dedication, continuous support, encouragement, and interest in this project, it would not have been completed. I cannot explain my sense of gratitude when I think of your invaluable role in this journey. To all my friends who provided words of encouragement, I would like to thank you. Finally, this work would not have been possible without the financial help of my supporters. Your contributions and inspiration mean far more than I could describe.

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List of Abbreviations

Center for Victims of Torture (CVT)

Companion Recovery (CR)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Integration of Stressful Life Events Scale (ISLES)

International Nongovernmental Organization (INGO)

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI)

Moral Injury Experience (MIE)

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The intent of this study was to explore and understand how meaning making, purpose, and hope can still be experienced in the midst of suffering by studying adult Iraqi refugees in Jordan. This study replicated Shantall's (1999) study entitled "The Experience of Meaning in Suffering Among Holocaust Survivors." The objective of that study was to understand and explore how life can still be experienced meaningfully in the face of tragedy, grief, and suffering among a select group of Holocaust survivors.

Background to the Problem

Findings of this study are significant in that meaning can be experienced when survivors view suffering as an opportunity to confront and overcome evil with good. Survivors overcome evil with good when they refuse to give up, insist on rising above the hardships of their circumstances, hold on to humane values, and find meaning in the meaningless process of suffering (Shantall, 1999). The findings of this study are of great importance today as the number of refugees who have survived war and torture increases across the globe. A message of hope is crucial for all who suffer and desire to maintain their dignity and self-respect; hope will provide them with evidence that a deep sense of meaning can still be experienced in the wake of suffering.

Millions of people around the world have been displaced forcibly due to conflict, persecution, violence, and human rights violations. In 2014 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015a) reported a total of 59.5 million displaced refugees worldwide. As the number of refugees continued to grow in 2015, it is likely that the number of refugees now exceeds 60 million. This means that 1 in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum worldwide (UNHCR, 2015a).

Displaced Iraqi people constitute one of the largest displaced groups in the world; they make up the third-largest refugee population after Afghan and Palestinian populations (Sassoon, 2009). Iraqi people have suffered the tragedy of bloodshed, violent acts, and political persecution for decades (Cordesman, 2015; Sassoon, 2009; Stacy, 2012). At the beginning of 2014, more than three million Iraqis had been displaced across their country, and almost 220,000 were refugees in other countries. It was predicted that by the end of 2016, there would be over 11 million Iraqis in need of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2016). Current estimates state that 48,000 Iraqi refugees are in Jordan, and 59% of these refugees fled Iraq due to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacks by the year 2014 (Refugee Council USA, 2015).

Iraqis have suffered and continue to suffer all kinds of violence and human cruelty, including suicide bomb attacks, kidnappings, sexual violence, forced marriages, murder, and torture. Ceaseless acts of violence and dehumanization have deeply traumatized the Iraqi people (Sassoon, 2009). Iraqi refugees in Jordan live under cruel conditions, battling unemployment and poverty, and this reality influences health, nutrition, education, and housing (Pickartz, 2009). Trauma can profoundly affect individuals' sense of safety and stability and challenge human existence by eroding any sense of purpose and meaning in life (Smith, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The present study sought to understand the phenomenon of meaning and purpose in life in the wake of suffering among Iraqi refugees who have survived trauma. The researcher examined how each participant maintains hope and experiences a meaningful life in the midst of personal suffering. This research increases understanding by contributing to the existing body of literature on trauma and the path to recovery. The study also addresses a gap within the literature on this topic since no previous research has used in-depth interviews to address the phenomenon

of meaning making in the face of suffering among Iraqi refugees. With an increased understanding of how meaning and hope can still be experienced among trauma survivors, clinicians working in the field of trauma therapy may better support trauma survivors throughout their healing journey by addressing oft-overlooked inner resources related to their inner being and spirit (Altmaier, 2013). Perhaps there are certain aspects that can be learned about Iraqi refugees in particular concerning how they have been able to work through their traumatic experience and suffering in finding meaning in life while other refugees have remained stuck and continue to suffer psychologically. This study was urgent as the patterns and trends of violence in Iraq indicate that the rate of bloodshed continues to grow, along with the number of refugees who are deeply traumatized (Cordesman, 2015). There is a pressing need to address the Iraqi refugee crisis for both humanitarian and political reasons. Serious actions and policies should be implemented sooner rather than later in response to the Iraqi refugee crisis in particular and to all refugees worldwide for more comprehensive treatment (Sassoon, 2009). There is a desperate need to understand trauma and its effects on human survival, and this research sheds light on areas that readers, academics, and policymakers can benefit from as they seek to respond to this predicament by shaping comprehensive refugee policies and programs. If more research on this topic could be conducted, there could also be a positive impact on the lives of other trauma survivors who share similar experiences with these Iraqi refugees.

Summary of the Problem

Fromm (1973) and Parsons (1951) described war trauma as the ultimate socially constructed disease that leads to social destruction (as cited in Poster, 2014). Millions of individuals and whole communities worldwide have suffered and continue to suffer from prolonged war-related traumatic stressors (Salihu, Morina, Ford, & Rushiti, 2010). Recent

estimates state that 32 armed conflicts with a minimum of 25 battle-related deaths took place around the world in 2012 (Themner & Wallensteen, 2013). The nature of modern warfare exposes whole populations to the risk of suffering extensive trauma, injustices, loss, and displacement (Silove, 1999). A large number of studies have reported high levels of psychopathological distress among civilian survivors of war (Stanford, Elverson, Padilla, & Rogers, 2014). Many of those who have experienced traumas in the context of war and torture have been subjected to years of discrimination, persecution, and forced exile (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998). Refugees, in particular, experience sequential stresses which may last over prolonged periods of time (Silove, 1999). Witnessing and surviving horrific and violent war practices leaves many refugees with significant symptoms of psychological distress, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, major depression, somatic complaints, disturbances in family and peer relationships, substance abuse, and a variety of other adverse outcomes (Shannon, 2012; Stanford et al., 2014).

Over the past 30 years, a growing number of refugees are fleeing Iraq and settling throughout the world due to a series of conflicts in their homeland. Insecurity has forced millions to flee their homes in Iraq (Lischer, 2008). Like most refugee groups, Iraqi refugees have experienced psychosocial trauma and the hardships of displacement (Mowafi & Spiegel, 2008). Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Lebanon show high levels of emotional and psychological distress, with symptoms including panic attacks, anger, fatigue, sleep problems, and fear (Al-Obaidi, Budosan, & Jeffrey, 2010).

The experience of trauma creates a condition whereby individuals confront the underlying uncertainty and instability of their own existence. Unreliable living situations and doubt about the future cause the highly traumatized refugees to experience additional

psychological trauma. El-Shaarawi (2015) explained that Iraqi refugees' experience of uncertainty about their future and their experience of life instability cause them significant stress and suffering. Refugees' pursuit of resettlement often offers a source of hope and a way to cope with uncertainty, but resettlement is in itself a process characterized by uncertainty. Judith Herman stated, "Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (1992, p. 33). In this way, trauma is a central attack on the existential component of human spirituality.

Despite some devastating consequences, trauma can promote spiritual growth (Pond, 2014). A traumatic event may overwhelm the human soul as it fails to contain and make sense of the trauma. As a result, processing a traumatic event almost always leads to a search for new meaning and purpose as well as a need for the soul to expand enough to contain the trauma. Consequently, spiritual growth can occur (Pond, 2014). The impulse to pursue a better understanding also nurtures one core aspect of spirituality: finding existential truth. Thus, trauma may indirectly serve as a stimulus for spiritual growth that may not occur otherwise. Whether or not a person subscribes to certain religious beliefs, most survivors of trauma reexamine the meaning and purpose of their lives (Decker, 2007).

Research Questions

In order to obtain understanding of the phenomenon of meaning in suffering among adult Iraqi refugees and how they find meaning and purpose in life after their trauma experience, the following questions are designed to facilitate the process:

- Please share as much as you feel comfortable with about your experience
- How did you feel and cope at that time?
- What kept you going?

- How did you manage to survive?
- What feelings do you have now when you think about your past experience?
- What, if anything, positive emerged from your experience with suffering?
- How, if at all, do you experience meaning and hope in the wake of your suffering?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Definitions

This section provides operational definitions for several relevant key terms: *hope*, *Iraqi refugee*, *meaning*, *phenomenology*, *refugee*, *suffering*, *trauma*, and *Iraq war trauma*.

Hope

Hope is a cognitive set which involves a way of thinking about one's own goals and is based on a mutually derived sense of successful agency reflected in one's ability and determination to achieve goals in the past, present, and future. Hope is influenced by the perceived availability of successful pathways and strategies to meet those goals (Snyder et al., 1990).

Iraqi Refugee (in Jordan)

Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, and therefore it is not obliged to follow the convention's mandates. The Jordanian government classified Iraqis as *guests* to avoid the term *refugees*—those meeting the criteria of article 1A(2) of the Refugee Convention—in order to reinforce the message that any stay, along with any rights owed to Iraqis, was limited. While the international community generally continues to describe Iraqis in Jordan as refugees, their current status is not so clear, leading to additional delimitations facing the hosting country and difficulties in the refugees' living conditions (Stevens, 2013). Jordan's government policy against encampment of Iraqi refugees allowed Iraqis who fled Iraq during the

past decade to settle among the local population. This policy has satisfied the desire of Iraqi refugees to avoid living in harsh camp situations (Kelberer, 2017); therefore Iraqis are required to pay for their visas and should obtain approval prior to their entry to Jordan and are required to renew their visas after expiry. Iraqis in Jordan who are unable to afford residency permits to reach a clear legal status have no guarantee of jobs, health care, or education for their children (Stevens, 2013). Considering Iraqi refugees in Jordan as *guests* with no clear legal status enables the state of Jordan to deny the refugees permanent residency and limits to some extent the government's role in meeting the Iraqi refugees' needs. International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and UNHCR are under obligation to take responsibility and respond to the Iraqi refugees' needs. Jordan's government has argued that the only solutions for displaced Iraqis were resettlement or repatriation, and the United Nations and donor countries have also agreed on this idea (Stevens, 2013). While the aim of many Iraqis is to obtain resettlement outside Jordan within six months after they have been recognized as refugees by UNHCR, significant numbers of them are still waiting for resettlement, which requires a longer time to arrange. Although UNHCR's and other INGOs' involvement has been crucial, the need for a well-structured and committed approach to provide protection and enabling access to needed services for Iraqi refugees is still needed (Stevens, 2013). This unclear situation leads many Iraqi refugees who suffer war trauma and torture to live under uncertain conditions, which creates more stress in addition to the challenging conditions of daily life they face for an extended time.

Meaning

I sought to follow Victor Frankl's (1969/2014) definition of *meaning* in this study: Meaning is something to be found rather than to be given, discovered rather than invented. For

Frankl, this meaning can be discovered in life in three different ways: by creating a work or doing a deed; by experiencing something or encountering someone; and by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 1946/2006). It is the unique human motivation of “will to meaning” and of the human choice to change our attitude and transform personal tragedy into a triumph; it is turning one’s predicament into a human achievement and purpose in life, thus finding something that makes life worth living.

Phenomenology

A qualitative methodology is intended to describe in depth the participants’ lived experiences through their own perspectives (Wertz, 2005). By interviewing participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon, researchers attempt to understand the essence as well as the variations of the investigated phenomenon across participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Refugee

According to the UN Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, a *refugee* is a person who is outside his or her home country due to fear of persecution for reasons of race, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or religion, and due to this fear, is unable to benefit from protection by his or her home country (UNHCR, 1992).

Suffering

Rogers and Cowles (1997) described suffering as “an individualized, subjective and complex experience characterized primarily by a person’s assigning to a situation or a perceived threat an intensely negative meaning. This meaning involves the loss, or perceived loss of one’s integrity, autonomy, and actual humanity” (p. 1050). Frankl (1948/2000) classified suffering into physical, psychological, and existential dimensions. The existential dimension of suffering refers to feelings of meaninglessness where humans lack orientation within a broader context and

therefore search for an understanding of life. For Frankl (1946/2006), “suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning” (p. 113). Additionally, suffering is viewed as an “enduring inevitable or unavoidable loss, distress, pain, or injury” (Pollock & Sands, 1997, p. 173). If it were avoidable suffering, then the meaningful thing to do would be to remove its cause, whether psychological, biological, or political (Frankl, 1946/2006). Synonyms of suffering illustrate its affective nature: *discomfort, anguish, distress, torment, pain, headache, misery, anxiety, and affliction* (Morse, 2001).

Trauma

The definition of *trauma* is consistent with that found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013): The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present: (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others; (2) the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. This distinct definition describes trauma as more than purely a negative life event.

Iraq war trauma since 2003. The history of Iraq from 2003 to 2011 is characterized by a large U.S. military deployment on Iraqi territory in 2003 leading to the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s government and ending with the departure of U.S. troops from the country in 2011. The Iraq sectarian war subsequently intensified during 2013, which was characterized by a dramatic increase in civilian deaths followed by continual ISIS attacks and fights between the Iraqi government and ISIS (Refugee Council USA, 2015). The Iraq War resulted in direct deaths and injuries due to combat-related violence; violent deaths and injuries due to revenge killing; deaths due to accidents related to military occupation, such as traffic crashes caused by military

convoys or at checkpoints; and the indirect harm to health that results from the destruction of infrastructure and the lingering environmental effects of war (Sharma & Piachaud, 2011). War can lead to a range of various traumatic experiences, such as witnessing extreme violence, terrorist attacks, kidnappings, rape, torture, separation from one's family, and forced migration (Johnson & Thompson, 2008). A positive association between war trauma and the presence of various mental health disorders has been found, with PTSD as one of the most common psychological complications among war trauma victims (Al-ghzawi, ALBashtawy, Azzeghaiby, & Alzoghaibi, 2014).

Significance of the Study

The importance of this topic is immense in many areas, including counseling, because there is not enough existing literature to create an adequate understanding of meaning in the face of suffering experienced by Iraqi refugees in various countries. Individuals who have experienced trauma are in need of a customized approach. Experiencing a trauma can change the way an individual sees the world (Vis & Boynton, 2008). When individuals face tragic situations that are at odds with their typical patterns of looking at the world, they need cognitive resources to assimilate this new information with existing schemas (Falsetti, Resick, & Davis, 2003). Studies provide evidence of the importance of spirituality as a vehicle of healing for traumatized individuals (De Castella & Simmonds, 2013; Fox, 2012; Skogrand et al., 2007). If traumatized individuals believe that their spirituality is helpful in overcoming their difficulties, it would seem that counselors should give these domains of experience a place in the treatment. Human spirituality is the pathway through which most trauma survivors restore or replace lost existential meaning and hope for the future (Smith, 2004). Once these beliefs have been reassessed, the new spiritual understanding may become a tool through which the trauma can be

processed. In this way, the need to understand life and events at a spiritual level serves as an impetus for addressing and recovering from trauma. Finding meaning in the wake of suffering can strengthen human will to live life and to cope with suffering. Rather than only focusing on posttraumatic stress symptomology, a broadened perspective on human experience that includes resiliency aspects can lead toward a more balanced approach to understanding trauma survivors and the path to recovery.

Engaging in this area of research can provide important information to help mental health professionals working with Iraqi refugees. This study communicates hope to war and torture survivors. It also provides encouragement and help for mental health professionals who are frustrated by the continuous suffering of their clients and the lack of available resources. In addition, the study provides information to help expand effective treatment of the human spirit and the dignity of Arab refugees in particular, as well as others who suffer and have lost meaning and hope in life.

Conceptual Framework

This study on meaning making in the wake of suffering builds on Victor Frankl's (1946/2006) theoretical approach of coping with trauma. His framework helps to describe how and why trauma survivors make meaning when they encounter trauma. Frankl emphasized the importance and uniqueness of human motivation by what he calls the "will to meaning." This builds on the assumption that humans have the innate capacity of free will to choose how to respond to life circumstances in a responsible manner (Frankl, 1969/2014). Once humans succeed in finding the meaning and purpose for which they want to live, they are capable of coping with suffering (Frankl, 1946/2006).

According to Frankl, meaning in life is discovered rather than made. Humans are capable of creatively turning negative life events into something constructive and positive. This ability also allows for changing oneself and taking responsible action when one is unable to change the situation (Frankl, 1946/2006). Therefore, one can relate to suffering with a beneficial attitude, learn a lesson or find positive meaning in the negative experience, revise life goals and global beliefs, make the best of any given situation, transform personal tragedy into a triumph, and transcend tragedy by cultivating spirituality. Having a strong sense of meaning and value is essential to surviving trauma and suffering. Frankl (1946/2006) recognized both ultimate meaning and situational meaning. Belief in ultimate meaning is connected to belief in the intrinsic meaning and value of the gift of life in spite of tragedy. The search for ultimate meaning promotes man's sense of hope and purpose, and so a search for meaning in meaningless situations will continue. Thus, ultimate meaning helps in the process of finding situational meaning and accommodating the reality of suffering and evil.

Park's (2010) meaning-making model focuses on the cognitive function of making sense of the world in negative situations. When humans face traumatic events, their global assumptions are challenged and often shattered. Global meaning influences situational meaning in that people review and assess their stressful situation and assign meaning to this particular event (Park, 2005). When people experience discrepancies between appraisals and global meaning, it creates a level of discomfort and a sense of loss of control, predictability, and comprehensibility of the world. Typically, people attempt to reduce their stress level by engaging in the process of meaning making (Park & Folkman, 1997). Meaning making involves attempts to understand and view a situation in a different way, reconstructing one's beliefs in order to reduce discrepancy. Klinger (1998) stated that this process may involve changing the

appraised situational meaning, changing global beliefs and goals, or both in order to reach consistency among them (as cited in Park & Ai, 2006). In Frankl's (1946/2006) theory, this global belief of meaningfulness stems from the inherent conviction that life has unique meaningful goals. Therefore, situational meaning cannot be separated from ultimate meaning because global beliefs guide the appraisal of situational meaning (Park, 2010).

Frankl (1946/2006) focused on meaning seeking that stems from human spiritual nature and how humans live purposefully in their attempt to fulfill meaningful goals. Once the search for meaning is successful, it not only makes people happy but also gives them the capability to cope with suffering.

In summary, if Iraqi refugees who survive trauma could succeed in finding and experiencing meaning under difficult and painful conditions, then hope exists that life has meaning that can never be destroyed. When trauma survivors experience unavoidable situations that cause suffering, they are challenged and motivated to discover and realize meaning. Thus, they strive to make sense of what has happened to them and make the best of it. Such efforts are based on their freedom to choose their actions and attitudes responsibly in the face of suffering. Suffering among trauma survivors may evoke questions about existence, perspective, and purpose and meaning in life. Trauma survivors may also exhibit an ability to rise above hardship and find meaning in their suffering in that they represent what Frankl (1946/2006) called "the defiant power of the human spirit" (p. 147). Humans are able to live and even die for the sake of their ideals and values (Frankl, 1964/2006). Meaning fulfillment can be seen in doing a deed or creating a work; in experiencing something or encountering someone; and when faced with a situation that a person cannot change, that person makes the best of it by changing themselves. A successful attempt at finding meaning requires evaluation of the situation one faces. When a

discrepancy between global and situational meaning exists, attempts to find meaning begin to reduce that discrepancy. Finding meaning requires understanding the situation in a different way, reviewing and reforming one's beliefs and goals in order to regain consistency (Park & Ai, 2006, p. 393).

Methodology

Bruner (2002) described two broad styles of knowing: paradigmatic and narrative. Paradigmatic knowing is associated with positivist physical sciences and seeks to explain the cause-and-effect relationship. In contrast, Burner stated that narrative knowing is associated with everyday accounts of human action, usually in the form of stories. Thus, a qualitative method's primary aim is to develop an understanding of how the social world is constructed. Van Manen (1990) argued that phenomenology aims to reduce experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence, a grasp of the very nature of the thing (as cited in Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). Albright, Epstein, and Duggan (2008) asserted that close attention to trauma narratives can aid in studying the impact of trauma on survivors. They highlighted the need to further develop qualitative knowledge and competence in order to deepen understanding of the lives of trauma survivors. In-depth research on the topic of spiritual experiences and trauma recovery may increase the effectiveness of trauma rehabilitation programs (Albright et al., 2008).

In order to understand how Iraqi refugees, who suffer war-related trauma, experience meaning and hope in the wake of their suffering, I used a phenomenological approach in this study. This approach is intended to describe in depth the participants' lived experiences through their own perspectives (Wertz, 2005). By interviewing participants who have direct experience

with the phenomenon, researchers attempt to understand the essence as well as the variations of the investigated phenomenon across participants (Moustakas, 1994).

To understand the unique lived experience of meaning in life in the wake of suffering among adult Iraqi refugees who live in Amman, Jordan, a phenomenological methodology was used in this study. Participants were selected based on a set of criteria from the Minnesota Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) based in Amman, Jordan. CVT is an international nonprofit organization that helps victims of torture and war violence by rebuilding their lives and bringing them hope for the future. Ethical considerations were made regarding consent forms and ensuring participants' freedom to participate as well as their safety. Data collection involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I audiotaped and transcribed the interviews and repeatedly reread the transcripts while looking for themes and patterns. In order to derive the "essence" of the phenomenon of the experience of meaning in suffering, I put my own views of the phenomenon aside, a process referred to as "*bracketing*" (Moustakas, 1994). Further details will follow in Chapter Three.

To establish the credibility of this study, I followed procedures to ensure validity. Qualitative researchers employ triangulation and trustworthiness of data and findings. Triangulation is a validity procedure that ensures that the narrative account is valid. To do that, I relied on multiple forms of evidence to form themes and categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Multiple sources of data included observations, notes, audible and transcribed data interviews, and field notes.

I realized the importance of self-disclosing my assumptions, beliefs, and biases in relation to the research topic. I allow my readers to understand my position by providing an explanation of my role as a researcher and my own personal experience (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I

describe my prior knowledge about the topic, my assumptions, perspective, and preexisting thoughts and beliefs, and I remained watchful throughout the research process. I was be open-minded when I attended to participants' accounts (Gearing, 2004).

I used member checking as a technique to verify data accuracy. This required me to constantly check my understanding of the phenomenon during the interviews by utilizing techniques such as paraphrasing and summarizing for clarification. I also shared emerged themes, thoughts, ideas, and feelings with each participant at the end of each interview to obtain their confirmation of the credibility of the narrative account and information by systematic checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In this study, I provided as much detail as possible. As Denzin (1989) recommended, I describe interactions between myself and the participants, including our experiences, actions, and feelings (as cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Participants

I interviewed three adult male Iraqi refugees who live in Amman, Jordan. The sample was selected through CVT. I interviewed any Iraqi refugee who met the following criteria:

- is 30 or above,
- was in Iraq for at least part of the 2003 Iraq War,
- has experienced war trauma,
- has immigrated to Jordan seeking refuge,
- has consent on file with CVT for their data to be used for research purposes and to participate in research,
- has completed individual and/or group therapy, and
- has completed a 6- or 12-month follow-up assessment.

Research on the relation between age and purpose suggests that those at later life stages generally experience more meaning in life compared to those at earlier life stages (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009) and that older individuals report a greater sense of purpose later in life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Bluck and Glück's (2004) study examined the ways in which individuals experience themselves as wise, building on the theme of meaning-making from a narrative processing model. A sample of adolescents (age 15–20), early adults (age 30–40), and older adults (age 60–70) were asked to define moments from their life story as touchstones of wisdom and key events that reflect insight or truth. The findings of this study suggest that experienced wisdom and the capacity to report life lessons emerges strongly in early adulthood (age 30–40) and maintains a consistent presence throughout the adult lifespan. Adolescents (age 15–20) from the study were less likely to verbalize experiences of wisdom that reflected a larger life philosophy or connection to a broader understanding of self or world. The researcher believes adult Iraqi refugees ages 30 and above may be better answer the research question than evolving adults.

Assumptions and Limitations

This research study has several innate limitations that must be taken into account. Primarily, as a qualitative study with a relatively small sample size, it is difficult to apply the results of this study generally to a larger population. However, as Creswell et al. (2007) noted, the objective of qualitative research is application rather than generalizability. Hence, the researcher argues that a qualitative research design allows for equally important implications for understanding unique perspective and meaning of individuals within this specific population. Another inherent limitation of phenomenological studies is the inability to apply causal inferences between variables. Although the researcher is limited in data analysis to subjective

descriptions that may be impacted by self-report and recall bias, these experiences are closely surveyed for variability and similarities.

There are two challenges with phenomenology. First, researchers need to carefully select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon rather than simply choosing those who have perspectives on the experience. Second, researchers may have difficulty bracketing experiences and deciding how and to what extent these assumptions are introduced to the study (Creswell et al., 2007). In this study, participants are considered the only legitimate source of data as they provide their own views and experiences. This suggests that a participant's view is taken as "fact." Sampling in this framework is purposive, and the main instrument of data collection is the interview (Goulding, 2005). Since the selection process of the sample depended on self-report, this self-selection bias was a possibility, and the sample could have included participants who have perspective rather than direct experience with the phenomenon. I expected that this sample would include participants from different religious backgrounds (e.g., Muslims, Sabians, Christians), but all participants were Muslim. I also remained aware that the participants' religious views and beliefs might influence how they experience meaning in the wake of suffering.

Reflexivity may complicate the research process due to the bidirectional relationship between the researcher and the participants (Flanagan, 1981). My role is that of a qualitative researcher, but I have my own views on meaning and purpose in the wake of suffering that are influenced by my Christian faith. This might lead to an opportunity for bias. To ensure trustworthiness of data, I described my role as a researcher as well as my beliefs and perspectives and followed a member-checking technique so that I could obtain participants' confirmation of the credibility of the narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

While I am aware of this study's limitations, I still believe that this study is of great importance because there is not enough existing literature to create an adequate understanding of meaning making in the face of suffering experienced by Iraqi refugees in various countries. Individuals who have experienced trauma are in need of a customized approach. Finding meaning in the wake of suffering can strengthen human will to live and help individuals cope with suffering. Rather than only focusing on posttraumatic stress symptomology, a broadened perspective on human experience that includes resiliency aspects can lead toward a more balanced approach in understanding trauma survivors and the path to recovery.

Summary

The intent of this study was to explore and understand how meaning, purpose, and hope can still be experienced in the midst of suffering by studying adult Iraqi refugees in Jordan. In order to understand how Iraqi refugees who suffer war trauma experience meaning and hope in the wake of their suffering, I used a phenomenological approach. This approach is intended to describe participants' lived experiences by conducting in-depth interviews with three adult male Iraqi refugees in Jordan. This study is of great importance since millions of people around the world have been displaced forcibly due to conflict, persecution, and human rights violations. Iraqi refugees in particular have suffered, as they now constitute one of the largest displaced groups in the world. Patterns and trends of violence in Iraq indicate continuous growth in the number of Iraqi refugees who have been deeply traumatized. The experience of trauma creates a condition whereby individuals confront underlying uncertainty and instability of their existence; this can overwhelm the human soul as it fails to experience hope and meaning. Finding meaning in the wake of suffering can strengthen the human will to live life and cope with suffering. This study builds on Victor Frankl's (1946/2006) theoretical approach that meaning in life can be

discovered and that humans have innate capacity of free will to choose and respond to life circumstances in a responsible manner. This study increases understanding of the phenomenon of meaning making in the face of suffering and provides important information to help mental health professionals who work with traumatized individuals and with Iraqi refugees in particular.

This study has several innate limitations that were taken into account. First, the small sample size makes it difficult to apply to a larger population. Also, the nature of the data analysis is limited to subjective descriptions that may be impacted by self-report and recall bias. Finally, the researcher could have had difficulty bracketing experiences and deciding how and to what extent these assumptions are introduced to the study.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters are organized as follows: Chapter Two will provide an extensive review of the literature on meaning making in the aftermath of psychological trauma, as well as the research methods used and the research outcome found in the literature. Chapter Three will be an account of the research methodology and research design. Chapter Four will provide findings of the study that address the research questions, and patterns and themes will be described. Finally, Chapter Five will include interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and future research direction.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter will review and examine literature on meaning making among trauma survivors who have faced the difficulty of war in their homeland. The purpose of this study was to understand how adult Iraqi refugees make meaning in their suffering. Iraqi refugees have experienced suffering including but not limited to significant war trauma and forced displacement from their home country. A number of empirical qualitative and quantitative studies have examined meaning making in the context of war trauma among veterans, Holocaust survivors, and refugees. Meaning making in the context of war trauma has been found to have an effect on posttrauma recovery. When trauma violates an individual's global beliefs, research indicates that a process of finding meaning takes place. Understanding how veterans, Holocaust survivors, and refugees process their trauma and find meaning in their suffering is important for posttrauma recovery for war survivors and Iraqi refugees in particular for the purpose of this study.

This chapter will first review the literature on meaning making among war veterans. A number of studies have examined the role of meaning making and the association between meaning making and trauma effect. Other researchers have examined the meaning-making model in an attempt to understand the process of meaning making. Reviewing literature on meaning making among Holocaust survivors is important because Holocaust survivors and refugees may share common experiences such as war trauma. A number of empirical studies on meaning making among refugees also will be discussed in this chapter. Meaning making in the current refugee crisis makes a compelling study because it could apply in areas around the world where individuals face the need for trauma recovery.

Forced displacement is currently on the rise across the globe. By the end of 2015, an estimated 65.3 million individuals had been forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations (UNHCR, 2015b). This number increased about 5.8 million within one year, compared to 59.5 million in 2014. The world is currently facing the biggest refugee and displacement crisis in recorded history (UNHCR, 2015b). As mentioned in Chapter One, displaced Iraqi people constitute one of the largest displaced groups in the world; they make up the third-largest refugee population after Afghan and Palestinian populations (Sassoon, 2009). Current estimates state that 48,000 Iraqi refugees are in Jordan, and 59% of these refugees fled Iraq due to ISIS attacks by 2014 (Refugee Council USA, 2015). Past experiences of traumatic events in their homeland and the current difficult living situations in Jordan make Iraqi refugees particularly vulnerable to poor mental health (Nickerson, Bryant, Steel, Silove, & Brooks, 2010; Willard, Rabin, & Lawless, 2014). In fact, one study among Iraqi refugees residing in Sydney found that almost half of participants reported the unnatural death (47%) or murder (46.7%) of a family member or friend; 41% had experienced being close to death; and almost 40% had suffered a lack of food or water. Additionally, this study reported that fear for the safety of family members remaining in Iraq was itself an independent predictor of PTSD and depression (Nickerson et al., 2010). Several studies confirm the traumatic experiences and trauma-related disorders among Iraqi refugees (Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, van der Tweel, & De Jong, 2005; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2008; Slewa-Younan et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2014; Tekin et al., 2016; Willard et al., 2014). Moreover, Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in Jordan not only suffer psychological distress, but they are also affected by fatigue from their long-lasting transit to nowhere and their challenging economical status since their legal status as “guests” does not allow them to work (Bjawi-Levine,

2009). Trauma effects become even more challenging to the well-being of a trauma survivor when there is a sense of uncertainty about their purpose and meaning in life (Frankl, 1969/2014). Meaning-making models, which suggest that stressful events may violate individuals' sense of meaning making (Park, 2010), are widely accepted as accurate descriptions of the process of recovery from highly stressful events, and from the basis of a variety of approaches to clinical interventions for trauma (Monson et al., 2006) and bereavement (e.g., Neimeyer, 1999).

In recent years, research on refugee mental health has moved beyond focusing on posttrauma symptomology to informing best trauma interventions (Murray et al., 2008). Recognizing the high levels of trauma among refugees who frequently struggle to overcome the psychological impacts of personal safety threats and of social and cultural dislocation, there is a pressing need for effective holistic psychological approaches that promote a sense of stability, safety, and trust, as well as an opportunity for refugees to regain a sense of control over their lives (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006). There has been remarkable interest in meaning making in recent years in research and how meaning matters for human well-being. Meaning making is considered fundamental in understanding human experience (Frankl, 1969/2014; Yalom, 1980) and is essential to surviving trauma and suffering (Frankl, 1969/2014). Many studies have found that searching for meaning is associated with lower levels of psychological distress (Ai, Cascio, Santangelo, & Evans-Campbell, 2005; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Sears, Stanton, & Danoff-Burg, 2003), and through finding meaning, individuals find life meaningful in the wake of human suffering and tragedy (Shantall, 1999). Understanding how Iraqi refugees make meaning of their trauma experience in current stressful life conditions adds to the body of research and informs trauma rehabilitation of overlooked components. Listening to Iraqi refugees' voices and learning from their own experience how they find meaning and purpose in

their life while suffering moves practitioners toward comprehensive and effective treatments that incorporate aspects of meaning making.

This chapter features a framework of meaning making that organizes the body of research addressing the process of coping in stressful life events through searching and finding meaning. This meaning-making framework will explain how and why growth or positive outcomes are often reported. This chapter will review existing literature concerning meaning making in the context of war trauma. War trauma can be experienced among both veterans and refugees. Several empirical studies address meaning making as a part of other areas of research, and most of these are quantitative studies among veterans (Schok, Kleber, Elands, & Weerts, 2008). Research on meaning making among refugees and after war is limited. Literature searches were conducted by using the following key words: meaning making, purpose in life, war, war trauma, Iraqi war, refugees, Iraqi refugees, and research. To obtain an adequate document sample, reference lists of obtained documents were examined, and articles believed to be relevant were retrieved so that abstracts could be reviewed. Applicable studies were included in this review. Relevant literature was obtained using the American Psychological Association databases (PsycINFO and EBSCOhost), Google search, and ProQuest (dissertations). Empirical studies are organized around the relationship between meaning making as a coping strategy, trauma experience and symptoms, and understanding the process of meaning making in the context of war trauma survivors, particularly among refugees.

Meaning Making Among Veterans

Individuals exposed to a traumatic event may respond to the event differently. Some individuals may develop PTSD while others do not. The cognitive restructuring model of coping may explain different responses among trauma survivors (Park & Ai, 2006). Psychologists

believed that PTSD results when core beliefs—for example, the world is benevolent, predictable, and meaningful, and the self is worthy—are violated (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Meaning making is a cognitive restructuring process that may take place after trauma. When meaning is made people can cope with traumatic stress (Park & Ai, 2006), and meaning can play a role in protecting against high levels of PTSD and depression symptoms following a traumatic event (Updegraff, Silver, & Holman, 2008). Prior research supports the idea that meaning in life may be important in reducing the possible negative effect of traumatic events such as PTSD and depression. The following research studies will explain the role of meaning making in the context of trauma.

Role of Meaning in the Context of War Trauma

The association between meaning making and trauma effects. A number of studies have supported the role of meaning making in the mental health of veterans and refugees. In a review of a number of empirical studies on the meaning of war trauma and peacekeeping experiences, Schok et al. (2008) showed that veterans reported more positive than negative effects. In addition, veterans who constructed positive meaning from war and peacekeeping experiences, especially related to combat exposure or high levels of perceived threat, were found to have better psychological adjustment (Schok et al., 2008). For example, Owens, Steger, Whitesell, and Herrera (2009) found that perceptions of meaningfulness in life were associated with less PTSD symptomatology, even after accounting for depression and guilt. Findings suggest that meaning in life may reduce the potentially negative effects of depression and PTSD severity. Owens and her colleagues examined the interrelations between guilt, depression, and meaning in life in the context of PTSD among 174 military veterans with a mean age of 57 years. The sample was largely male (91%) and Caucasian (93%), having served in World War II (3%),

the Korean War (3%), between the Korean and Vietnam Wars (12%), Vietnam (75%), post-Vietnam (33%), Gulf War I (19%), Iraq (8%), and Afghanistan (5%). Participants completed an online survey about combat exposure, PTSD symptoms, depression, guilt, and meaning in life. Results of a hierarchical regression indicated that younger age, higher levels of combat exposure, depression and guilt, and lower meaning in life predicted greater PTSD severity. Although the cross-sectional design of Owens and her colleagues does not allow determination of the direction of influence among variables, the finding is still indicative of the vital role of meaning making in psychological adjustment to trauma.

Similarly, Currier, Holland, Chisty, and Allen (2011) found that meaning made of possible traumas was uniquely linked with PTSD. This study's aim was to examine the extent to which someone has adaptively made meaning of a stressor among a sample ($N = 169$) of returning service members following a combat deployment in Iraq or Afghanistan with a mean age of 35.9. Participants completed the Integration of Stressful Life Events Scale (ISLES) with respect to the most stressful life event over the entirety of their life; they completed the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist—Civilian Version; and psychiatric distress was assessed on the Symptom Checklist-10 (revised version). ISLES items are designed to measure the extent to which someone has adaptively made meaning of a stressor. Bivariate analyses showed that the degree to which participants had adaptively integrated their global beliefs with situational meanings of their traumatic events following combat was strongly negatively correlated with self-report of PTSD symptoms and psychiatric distress. Results of clinical outcomes also demonstrated that individuals who reported less adaptive meaning made after a stressor were at significantly greater risk for receiving a mental health consult, psychiatric medication, or mental health diagnosis, each of which presumably indicates worse adjustment in most cases. Similarly,

Fontana and Rosenheck (2005) found that veterans who experienced a loss of meaning were more likely to seek mental health services in the years after their deployments. Findings are consistent with Park's (2010) model; the high prevalence of psychiatric difficulties of war veterans may indicate an existential crisis for many persons who try to reduce distress caused by discrepancies between their apprised meaning and global meaning and goals. Although the study conducted by Currier et al. (2011) is consistent with the model of meaning making, the study focus was on a stressor with respect to the most stressful life event over the entirety of their life. This means that veterans might have reported traumatic events prior to their deployment, such as childhood trauma, or after their deployment, such as the accidental loss of a loved one. Hence, stressors reported might not relate to war trauma, whereas the focus of the present study was on the experience of trauma in the context of war.

Moreover, Blackburn and Owens (2015) sought to examine the presence of and search for meaning in life and self-efficacy as possible buffers against PTSD and depression symptom severity in a veteran sample ($N = 93$), as the presence of and search for meaning in life and self-efficacy may be important in defending against the development and maintenance of these symptoms. The findings of Blackburn and Owens contradicted earlier findings that veterans who reported high loss in meaning after their combat trauma usually seek mental health care, indicating that they seek to restore the lost sense of meaning (Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005). Having a sense of meaning in life was associated with lower levels of PTSD symptoms and depression (Owens et al., 2009). In Blackburn and Owens's (2015) study, participants completed an online survey comprised of the Combat Exposure Scale, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, Self-Efficacy Scale, Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21, and PTSD Checklist—Specific Stressor Version. The majority of participants were Caucasian males who served in

various service eras. Results indicated that a focus on strengthening self-efficacy may assist with lower levels of PTSD and depression symptomatology after combat trauma. Search for meaning was significantly positively associated with depression symptom severity ($p < .05$) but was not significantly related to PTSD severity. The presence of perceived meaning in life was not a significant predictor of PTSD severity in the final regression model, and neither was the interaction between meaning in life and combat exposure (Blackburn & Owens, 2015). Perhaps the differences between samples could explain the different findings among the studies, or it might be that Blackburn and Owens (2015) focused on the role of both meaning in life and self-efficacy whereas self-efficacy was not one of the variables that other studies included.

In contrast to Blackburn and Owens's (2015) finding, Currier et al.'s (2011) study demonstrated that veterans who had greater difficulty making meaning of trauma, which involves integrating their memory into existing global meaning systems, experienced significantly higher levels of PTSD symptoms. Similarly, Holland, Lisman, and Currier's (2013) study suggested that difficulties in meaning making among veterans with mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) might be a contributing factor for the development of PTSD. Holland et al.'s (2013) cross-sectional study sought to provide a preliminary test of the meaning made of trauma as a possible mediating factor between mTBI and PTSD symptoms among 162 Iraq and/or Afghanistan war veterans who presented for health care services at a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital. Structural equation modeling was used to (a) examine the link between probable mTBI (derived from the results of a second-level screening) and the three different PTSD symptom domains (re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyper-arousal); and (b) assess whether or not different aspects of the meaning made of trauma may statistically account for this link. Participants completed a two-level evaluation for mTBI as well as a self-report

questionnaire assessing demographic and military background factors, meaning made of trauma, and PTSD symptomatology. Results indicated that probable mTBI was indirectly associated with the three domains of PTSD symptomatology through veterans' meaning made of trauma. This study had several limitations that may have affected the conclusions presented here. As noted previously, the cross-sectional nature of this study and other studies limits any cause-and-effect relationship among the variables. In addition, it is possible that the PTSD symptoms reported may reflect difficulties in assimilating a traumatic event into preexisting global beliefs. Perhaps the memory and cognitive abilities of veterans with possible brain injuries have been affected. Other factors might relate to the experience of loss and grief in a veteran's life. Previous research on examining the role of combat loss among Vietnam War veterans suggests that combat loss was uniquely associated with the past and with current functional impairments among the participants but was not uniquely associated with PTSD symptoms (Currier & Holland, 2012). Longitudinal designs can allow for the examination of additional psychological factors—for example, the participants' preexisting beliefs that might account for meaning-based processing among veterans with mTBI.

Testing the meaning-making model. According to Park's (2010) meaning-making model, people possess global meaning systems that encompass their fundamental beliefs about the world, life-pursuing goals, and their subjective feelings of purpose or meaning in life. Through this global meaning system, individuals experience a sense of consistency and predictability in the world in which they live. In addition, the system is considered a reference point by which events in life are interpreted and appraised. When people experience a stressful event they may go through various forms of appraisals. When their appraisals of the stressful situation violate their global beliefs, they experience stress as a result (Park, 2010; Park &

Folkman, 1997). Although stress may lead to negative outcomes, it is also believed that this stress works as a motivator to initiate the search for and discovery of meaning to reduce the distress level (Park, 2010). The process of meaning making is an attempt through which discrepancy between global and situational meaning can be reduced. As a result of this process, people can modify their initial appraisals of the events, or they can change their global meaning, or they can experience growth. Research suggests that people who have made meaning from traumas report lower distress (Updegraff et al., 2008), and those whose global beliefs appear not to be violated experience less posttraumatic distress (Owens et al., 2009; Steger, Frazier, & Zaccanini, 2006).

The model of meaning has been tested in a study conducted by Steger, Owens, and Park (2015) which sought to examine whether violations of goals or beliefs or both have indirect effects on trauma severity (PTSD) and posttraumatic (stress-related growth) outcomes and whether violations of goals or beliefs or both have indirect effects later on veterans' presence of and search for meaning in life. In Steger et al.'s (2015) cross-sectional study of military trauma, Vietnam veterans ($N = 130$) completed assessment measures on PTSD, trauma severity, stressful event appraisal, and meaning in life in an online survey by evaluating the presence of and search for meaning in life. Participants were mostly male (91%) and Caucasian (93%) with a mean age of 61 years. Findings showed an association between the severity of military stress and violations of beliefs and goals. This finding supports basic views of the meaning model: Intense stressors violate people's beliefs about the world and their perceived ability to achieve valued goals. Only goal violations carried indirect effects of severity on PTSD symptoms. Presence of meaning was negatively associated with PTSD severity and positively related to stress-related growth while the search for meaning was positively related to PTSD severity. In addition,

findings revealed that there was no significant positive correlation between search for meaning and trauma severity or stress-related growth. In conclusion, findings suggest that traumatic stress may disrupt people's goals, and meaning making may center on these disruptions.

Presence of meaning in life was related to stress-related growth, and goal violation was strongly related to PTSD. The search for meaning in life was related to stress-related growth but not PTSD.

Likewise, the findings of Owens et al. (2009) suggest that violations of goals (but not violations of global beliefs) may be the most relevant determinant of posttrauma adjustment in terms of PTSD symptoms and stress-related growth. Goal violations not only played an important role in the relationship between trauma severity and posttrauma adjustment, but these violations also maintained significant direct relations with PTSD and stress-related growth, despite inclusion of sense of meaning in life in the model. Thus, the degree to which military trauma disrupted veterans' sense that they could achieve or maintain valued goals was critical to understanding their PTSD symptoms. Presence of meaning in life appeared more strongly related to stress-related growth but not PTSD. Findings of this study support the central role of having a sense of meaning in life in psychological adjustment. It seems that the sense of meaning in life is achieved when individuals engage in activities that align with life goals. As a result, stress symptoms are reduced. Owens et al.'s (2009) study has a number of limitations. For example, recalling a traumatic experience that occurred at least 40 years ago might be affected by memory functioning level, which could therefore affect the findings of the study. In addition, the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables in cross-sectional design studies is not possible. Since the defining feature of cross-sectional studies is to compare different variables at a single point in time, what happened before and after that specific time is not taken

into consideration. There is still a need for developing a valid tool to assess the construct of meaning to measure appraisals of discrepancy (Park, 2010).

Regardless of the limitations of the Owens et al. (2009) study, the study is still useful to the field of trauma and psychological adjustment among refugees. The ability to make meaning (e.g., growth, sense of meaning in life) from a traumatic experience is an important part of adjustment. If Iraqi refugees are able to make meaning out of their suffering, it is expected that they can adjust and experience less trauma symptomology. Refugees will be able to remember their experience because it is relatively new compared to the sample of veterans who had to remember their experiences from many years past, and the suffering of refugees is still ongoing. Veterans can return back to their homeland, yet refugees long to return to their homes but often must resettle in another country. In addition, refugees' lives in the refuge country differ from the lives of returned veterans in terms of refugees' limited financial, health, and educational resources and challenging living circumstances. War and armed conflicts cause lasting changes in social conditions including increased poverty, lack of employment, community violence, changed social networks, and separation from family (Ajdukovic, 2004). Refugees also may have experienced torture during wartime, including subjection to years of discrimination, persecution, and forced exile (Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998).

Although there are significant differences between veteran and refugee war trauma, there are still many aspects that both groups have in common. Both refugees and veterans may witness events in the war zone that challenge their sense of humanity and their deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. The concept of moral injury was first addressed in the context of military trauma. Warzone wounds may not be limited to the risk of injury or death in service. Veterans may confront a range of moral injury experiences (MIEs) that could arise from

witnessing human suffering and the consequence of violence and injustice. The moral injury concept attempts to capture inappropriate guilt, shame, anger, self-handicapping behaviors, relational and spiritual/existential problems, and social alienation that emerges after witnessing and/or participating in warzone events that challenge one's basic sense of humanity (Currier, Holland, & Malott, 2015). The Moral Injury Questionnaire–Military Version was developed to assess a comprehensive range of MIEs that might occur in warzone deployments (Currier, Holland, Drescher, & Foy, 2013). This questionnaire covers several different types of betrayals (by peers, leadership, trusted civilians, or self); acts of disproportionate violence in the warzone (e.g., acts of revenge and/or retribution, unnecessary destruction of civilian property); incidents involving death/harm to civilians; acts of violence committed within military ranks (i.e., friendly fire incidents); and the inability to prevent death/suffering, ethical dilemmas, or moral conflicts from deployment-related decisions/actions (e.g., violating rules of engagement to save the life of a comrade or civilian). Currier et al. (2015) examined if exposure to MIEs among Iraq and/or Afghanistan veterans ($N = 131$) could contribute to mental health problems and the ability for veterans to make meaning of possible traumas. Each veteran completed a self-report questionnaire assessing their demographic and military background, exposure to traditional combat stressors and possible MIEs, meaning made of a salient stressor, and mental health symptomatology (PTSD, depression, and suicidality). Findings revealed that MIEs were indirectly linked with mental health outcomes via the extent to which veterans were able to make meaning of their identified stressors. In addition, the direct path from MIEs to mental health problems was statistically significant. These findings provide preliminary evidence that difficulties with meaning making could serve as a mediating pathway for how MIEs increase the risk for adjustment problems after warzone service, but these findings also demonstrate that other

factors associated with moral injury also have a bearing on psychological functioning among veterans. All areas the Moral Injury Questionnaire–Military Version scale assess moral beliefs about the self, others, and the world, and when those beliefs are violated, it either results in the search for meaning and making meaning or in an unresolved discrepancy between situational and global beliefs that may reflect the inability to find meaning in the stressful events.

Currier et al. (2015) focused on examining the link between moral injury and the ability to make meaning by utilizing a cross-sectional design where independent and mediating factors were assessed simultaneously. Therefore, it is not clear if veterans' inability to make meaning resulted from their exposure to moral injury. Veterans in this study completed the ISLES evaluation, which measures the extent to which someone has adaptively made meaning of a stressor. This scale was completed with respect to the most distressing event over their lifetimes, which may or may not have occurred during deployment. Currier et al. exclusively relied on veterans' self-reports. Thus, accuracy of the results depended on the veterans' ability and willingness to provide this sensitive information. Findings support the call for qualitative phenomenology as it allows for interaction between the researcher and the population. Findings also demonstrate that such research may also help participants talk about their trauma experience during war time and how they were able to make meaning out of this time of continuous suffering. Studying Iraqi refugees who have been morally injured and have experienced a range of guilt, shame, anger, relational, and spiritual/existential problems is valuable, and it was beneficial to hear from them how they still make meaning while suffering.

In summary, searching for meaning in life has been demonstrated to be distinctly different from presence of meaning in life, and research has indicated that searching for meaning is correlated with negative affect, depression, and neuroticism (Steger et al., 2006). Research has

also shown that a sense of meaning can protect against PTSD and depression symptoms after traumatic events (Updegraff et al., 2008) and is associated with greater well-being (Steger et al., 2006). If people are unable to maintain a sense of meaning in life after a traumatic event such as combat, then they may be more vulnerable to developing mental health problems such as PTSD or depression. Other research with veterans of various service eras suggests that meaning in life may reduce the potentially negative effects of depression on PTSD severity (Owens et al., 2009). Thus, prior research supports the notion that meaning in life may be important in reducing the possible negative effects of traumatic events, effects such as PTSD and depression. When supported with the subjective experience of individuals through qualitative inquiry, quantitative data provide a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is experienced in the wake of suffering. The present study, which used a qualitative approach among Iraqi refugees, adds to the existing knowledge on meaning in suffering.

Meaning in terms of comprehensibility and personal significance has been found to play a role in the adjustment process following trauma (Davis et al., 1998). Individuals try to achieve comprehensibility through understanding what happened to them and why it happened. On the other hand, personal significance can be achieved when people appraise and interpret what they have gained from the experience in terms of personal skills, relationships, life philosophy, and worldview (Joseph & Linley, 2005). When benefit is derived out of the traumatic experience, it is expected that posttraumatic reactions will decrease while daily functioning and quality of life will improve.

Meaning in terms of benefit finding. A study (Schok, Kleber, Lensvelt-Mulders, Elands, & Weerts, 2011) among Dutch veterans supported studies by Owens et al. (2009) and Currier et al. (2011) by demonstrating that positive meaning was found to be related to less

posttraumatic stress responses. Schok et al. (2011) examined meaning as a mediator between perceived threat and posttraumatic stress response among a sample of 1,561 Dutch veterans with a mean age of 57.7 years who were deployed during various military operations. Various measures were used to assess: (a) the experience of warzone stressors and threatening events during deployment; (b) the impact of traumatic events on a person's intrusive thoughts, behaviors, and emotional numbing and avoidance; (c) the meaning of war in terms of comprehensibility; (d) the meaning of war in terms of finding benefit and personal significance; and (e) the quality of life. Path analysis was performed to assess the expected relationships between the observed variables. Findings showed that shooting weapons, witnessing human suffering, the presence of landmines, witnessing dead bodies, and witnessing severely wounded persons were the most commonly reported stressors. First, the perceived threat related to warzone stressors was found to be associated with more distrustful beliefs and more personal benefits. The findings partially supported that positive meaning was related to fewer posttraumatic stress responses. It showed that pathways of meaning in terms of distrust and personal benefits mediated the relationship between perceived threat and intrusion and avoidance (Schok et al., 2011). This finding explains that the severity of the traumatic event the participant described as the most stressful challenged that participant's core beliefs. Intrusion and avoidance symptoms could explain the process of finding meaning that usually starts when global and situational meaning are divergent; people attempt to assimilate the experience into existing fundamental beliefs through the process of finding meaning (Park, 2010; Park & Ai, 2006).

Meaning in this study has been examined in terms of finding benefit and personal significance. Meaning in terms of benefit-finding regarding self-image, cognitions, feelings, and behavior has been reported by a number of studies (Aldwin, Levenson, & Spiro, 1994; Britt,

Adler, & Bartone, 2001; Fontana & Rosenheck, 1998). The findings of the Schok et al. (2011) study are supported by another empirical study among a sample of Bosnian refugees in the Netherlands (Mooren & Kleber, 2001) in which fundamental beliefs in others and the world were affected by perceiving high threat as a result of exposure to warzone trauma. A sample of Bosnian refugees showed higher levels of distrust associated with intrusion and avoidance, and they negatively related to optimism and perceptions of the world as meaningful (Mooren & Kleber, 2001). The Bosnian refugees had more positive perceptions about the benevolence of both the impersonal world and people than Bosnian citizens did. In contrast, a study of Israeli veterans revealed that those who had developed PTSD perceived the world as less benevolent than did the ones without symptoms (Dekel, Solomon, Elkliit, & Ginzburg, 2004), suggesting that traumatic events vary greatly and affect individuals' cognitions differently. Therefore, creating meaning in terms of a positive worldview appears to be an important task for war survivors for better adjustment, a practice that could be used with refugees as well.

On the other hand, Wood, Britt, Thomas, Klocko, and Bliese (2011) examined the role of benefit finding in protecting from adverse consequences of high levels of combat exposure during the combat deployment among 1,925 U.S. Army soldiers deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Benefit finding was examined by assessing various positive domains, including changes in self-perception, changes in interpersonal relationships, having gained a sense of accomplishment, and having an influence on future life directions in terms of moderating the relationship between PTSD and depression. Regression analyses revealed that benefit finding was associated with lower levels of PTSD and depression. However, benefit finding during combat deployment was found to moderate the combat exposure PTSD relationship such that the relationship was stronger when benefit finding was low. High benefit

finding was associated with lower PTSD and depression symptoms, even after controlling for deployment length (Wood et al., 2011).

Creating a meaningful experience by finding personal benefits appears to improve overall satisfaction with life. Personal benefits seem to have more of an effect on quality of life than on the amount of intrusive and avoidant thoughts in the Schok et al. (2011) study. In another community-based sample of Vietnam veterans, Fontana and Rosenheck (2005) found that those who experienced a loss of meaning were more likely to seek mental health services in the Veterans Health Administration in the years after their deployments. This suggests the important role of meaning in recovering from traumatic experience.

With studies of a cross-sectional nature, one cannot argue for the causal relationship between variables. This must be confirmed by longitudinal research. In addition, self-report data would limit the results to address participants' own perceptions rather than their objective experience. Benefit-finding scales assessed specific areas whereas benefit finding could also include areas that are not assessed.

Qualitative Research Among Veterans

Notably most of the published data has been quantitative and concerns veterans but not refugees. Few qualitative articles regarding soldiers' perspectives on war experience could be identified. Brenner et al.'s (2015) qualitative study was conducted to increase understanding regarding events and symptoms related to physical and emotional trauma associated with deployment by focusing on narratives of Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom soldiers ($N = 103$). Soldiers participated in semistructured interviews focused on in-theater and reintegration-related experiences, including the need to make meaning regarding what they had witnessed, how the experiences affected their ability to carry out their duties, and what strategies

they used to cope with their trauma. In reflecting on their experiences, soldiers reported positive and negative changes associated with deployments. Many spoke about increased feelings of competency and maturity, and while some noted their own resiliency, others discussed feeling confused and upset by what they had seen and done while deployed. Soldiers felt emotionally and morally challenged by the process of trying to make sense of what they had witnessed. Moreover, many of the soldiers interviewed discussed challenges associated with reintegration. Often they related these challenges to changes in both themselves (symptoms) and the world around them. Many interviewed veterans spoke about a greater sense of self-confidence and self-discipline as a result of their deployment. They also indicated feeling more mature and competent. Although the study's main focus was not to find out how veterans make meaning of what they witnessed, one can infer that veterans were able to make meaning through the good deeds they performed during their deployment and the difference they made in others' lives. For example, some participants mentioned that they helped people in their deployment area by setting up schools and clinics and bringing pleasure to kids by giving them meals and candy (Brenner et al., 2015, p. 282). This finding is consistent with Frankl's (1946/2006) observation that meaning can be made through involvement in purposeful work, love, and courage in the face of difficulty. However, the findings of this study only partially inform the body of research on the experience of meaning. Further research is needed to add to the knowledge base for mental health practitioners so that they may better serve populations like veterans and refugees who suffer trauma symptoms that challenge the very core of their existence.

Larner's (2013) grounded theory study explored the meaning-making coping process by focusing on four main areas. The first area concerned combat veterans' beliefs about their experiences. The second was about utilized meaning-making processes. The third was to

understand how meaning-making coping is associated with the significant relationships combat veterans have. The final area was to understand how these beliefs, meaning-making processes, and relationship interactions vary among different experience outcomes among veterans. Larner's study employed semistructured interviews with 15 male combat veterans from the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Results suggested that success or failure to engage in meaning-based coping during and after deployment is determined by participants' global beliefs. It has been noted that the presence of adequate global beliefs led to low discrepancy between situational and global meaning and helped veterans to perceive their war experience as a challenge to be overcome. Overcoming challenges can be achieved by improved mental and emotional focus and internal control. After their deployment, veterans reported improved relationships with significant others (Larner, 2013). The findings of Larner's (2013) study indicate that certain global beliefs are most protective when they are shared with significant people in one's life, particularly those in one's family of origin, which remains a resource as well as a source of support after the combat deployment. In contrast, Larner reported that insufficient global beliefs of the highly traumatized group and the initial beliefs of the growth-oriented group led to high discrepancy of meaning, and this led to a sense of existential threat, physiological and emotional flooding, and high symptomology. Participants in the highly traumatized group also reported difficulties with most significant relationships and increased closeness with other highly traumatized combat veterans. The growth-oriented group reported congruent experiences with the highly traumatized group until some point after their deployment when they recalled a change in their global beliefs. At this point, they reported that their beliefs and meaning-based coping styles began to match those of the resilient group. The growth-oriented combat veterans mentioned that it was the change in their global beliefs that led to lower symptom levels and

improved relationships with others. These findings validate the study of meaning-making coping as a centrally important theoretical construct regarding combat trauma. Though the sample was small, the slight but identifiable differences between groups are compelling. What is believed before combat affects the perception of and response to combat itself, which in turn leads to different levels of effectiveness and the ability to cope successfully afterward. A faith-based belief system, as expressed in the resilient veterans' narratives, may not be necessary but appears to have a role in meaning-based coping. The resilient veterans' faith-based belief system helped them find answers for their questions and check those answers against their experience. Their faith led them to a trusting relationship with God, believing that God would either bring them through their circumstances or, if they were to have to make the sacrifice and face death, there would be meaning behind that sacrifice. Their death would be for a worthy cause that was greater than themselves. To them, the appraised meaning of their war was about taking on enemies who had been a state sponsor of terrorism, and in doing so, the soldiers would be bringing freedom to the terrorized group. Resilient veterans' ability to forgive their enemies resulted from their understanding of their role in the war and their view of their enemies as humans and as equals. Forgiveness, letting go, and moving forward also characterized resilient veterans with a renewed focus on meaningful relationships.

Clearly, effective assimilation of traumatic events is linked with certain beliefs, and when trauma is assimilated successfully, there is a decreased need for meaning-related coping and there are also fewer intrusive related symptoms. This idea of accepting what cannot be changed, actively changing what can be changed, knowing the difference, and consciously asking a higher power to grant this frame of mind reflects a mindset that is powerful (Larner, 2013). Resilient veterans believed that their actions had a higher purpose; therefore, they were able to focus, stay

calm, and view events as challenges to be overcome. Their global beliefs were found to be adequate when appraised meanings were congruent with their combat experience. Because their experiences were consistent with their expectations, they were better able to make challenge appraisals, which allowed them to focus on making decisions that were compatible with these appraised meanings and global beliefs.

The findings of this study should lead researchers to consider the role of global beliefs more thoroughly and to examine the importance of shared meaning with significant others (Larner, 2013). Though other traumas do not share the same interpersonal burden of combat trauma, these findings demonstrate that the process of meaning-making coping is likely to be a key factor in understanding these traumas as well as refugees' traumas. Though the specific appraised meanings and global beliefs may be different, the process overall should be useful.

Meaning making is one of the essential factors that helps an individual recover from a trauma. Park (2010) identified several key aspects related to meaning making. Individuals either find meaning through acceptance of the traumatic event, "coming to terms" with the event, "making sense" of their experience, or finding a way to weave the event into their narrative that makes sense to them (Park, 2010). The individual's ability to integrate the event into their personal story suggests that a change has occurred in self-perception and identity (Park, 2010). Examples of finding meaning out of trauma may include positive changes that are reflected in improved relationships, enhanced personal resources and coping skills, and a greater appreciation for life (Park & Helgeson, 2006). A change or shift in identity is also common for people who have made meaning out of a stressful experience. For example, Cater's (2012) phenomenological study provided an in-depth understanding of the adjustment of female veterans to traumatic limb loss. Experience included personal safety fears, body image issues,

grief, and loss. Common themes emerged in three major categories: physical disability adjustment issues, psychosocial adjustment and coping skills, and an emerging new sense of self and life purpose. Protective factors contributed toward personal resilience or the capacity to adapt to change. Cater reported that among these women, protective factors included a positive attitude, social support, recovery in a military culture, psychological resiliency, recognition that it could have been worse, a sense of humor, and making meaning out of their loss. All participants agreed that a positive attitude was essential to their recovery. Frankl (1946/2006) believed that humans have the capacity to find or create a sense of meaning and purpose through their suffering and loss. The six women who lost a limb or limbs in military combat found comfort in having lost their limb in service to their country. Several women stated that surviving the loss of a limb gave them new courage and made them stronger. The experience of loss gave them a new perspective on life and the freedom to try things they never thought about doing. They perceived life as a gift and expressed that while they could not control everything in life, they could control their responses and attitude.

It is suggested that meaning making and posttraumatic growth (PTG) are connected, and meaning making is seen to promote growth. PTG occurs when an individual makes sense of trauma by acknowledging the positive change that happened after trauma (Park, 2010). In an attempt to examine the relationship between PTG and meaning making, Giorgio's (2016) doctoral research project employed a qualitative phenomenological study focusing on how veterans make meaning of their military PTG experiences. This study included an interpretative phenomenological analysis of 10 veterans' interviews. This methodology was an inquiry about how veterans found meaning after trauma or combat and what helped them find and experience such growth. What motivating factors facilitate veterans to carry on after

trauma? Is this a conscious, active process, or is it more automatic? What has helped these veterans achieve a sense of stability and growth after their trauma? (Giorgio, 2016). Several major themes emerged from the analyses: positive growth, positive emotions, self-perceptions, and positive relationships. In addition to these four themes, there were 15 subcategories and an additional category of current approaches and systemic issues that impacted veterans. This study suggested that veterans experience growth in areas of achievement, maturity, perspective shifts, physical health, and spirituality (Giorgio, 2016). Participants also shared their engagement with positive emotions, experiences with altruism, and gratitude for their experiences. Family, mentors, and other veterans were identified as part of the support system that contributed to growth and positive change post-military service.

Giorgio's (2016) study points to the value of listening to the voices of veterans and suggests that the inclusion of conversations between mental health providers and veterans about positive growth experiences might allow veterans to feel more supported in their healing process post-deployment. One of the areas in which participants felt they had experienced growth post-deployment was related to their vocational goals. To apply this result to refugees, researchers and practitioners can listen to the lived experience of Iraqi refugees who have not been allowed to work; after all, vocational goals are not their current focus. Listening to these accounts would help discern how Iraqi refugees make meaning when working is not even an option and would lead to an in-depth analysis of emotional growth.

The participants in Giorgio's (2016) study reflected on their growth experience, positive changes, and factors that contributed to their growth. Giorgio observed that the participants shared more achievement-oriented values than transcendent meaningful experiences (2016). Perhaps this is related to the nature of the research questions that focused more on PTG rather

than on the experience of meaning making, which was the focus of this study; or on the experience of meaning in the wake of suffering among Iraqi refugees; or it might be related to the nature of the population of veterans in particular and/or the nature of their trauma. Giorgio (2016) pointed out that future research exploring PTG among other populations or different trauma would be worthwhile. In addition, Giorgio observed that participants felt compelled to share their traumatic stories although the study questions focused on PTG. Although the present study's main focus was not on PTG but on the experience of meaning in suffering, it was expected that participants might also reflect on areas of growth and other transcendent meaningful experiences that resulted from the meaning-making process. Contrary to Giorgio's study, participants in this study were given an opportunity to talk about their personal experiences so that their voices could be heard and a broader perspective of their experience could be obtained.

Veterans and refugees may share some warzone experiences, including witnessing horrific events such as killing and dead bodies, viewing destruction, experiencing injuries, and lacking a sense of personal safety. On the other hand, the experience of veterans and refugees varies greatly. For example, refugees are forced to leave their homeland for another country, perhaps accompanying their families and children and leaving behind other family members and friends, or they may flee as individuals, leaving even their close family members behind. Refugees continue to suffer psychologically, financially, and socially in the refuge country. In contrast, after deployment veterans return back to their homeland where the financial and social supports are not primarily sources of distress, and they reconnect with their families.

Meaning Making Among Holocaust Survivors

Meaning making has been examined among various groups of Holocaust survivors. Holocaust survivors have suffered extreme cruelty and inhumanity. Some of them lived through their trauma experience as children and youth, and others lived it as adults. Holocaust survivors, like refugees, were forced to leave their homeland. Examining literature on what has helped Holocaust survivors to cope and move forward in their lives has great value for the field of trauma and recovery. Extreme cruelty and all kinds of evil practices were performed during the Nazi era, and yet many Holocaust survivors were able to continue their lives and move forward. This prompted Teria Shantall (1999) to ask this question: Can life still be experienced as meaningful in the face of such tragic suffering?

Meaning in Suffering

Shantall (1999) observed that while a number of studies focused on the coping behavior of individuals under stress and on stress management, there was a lack of studies addressing the phenomenon of meaning and suffering. Shantall's personal experience of meaning was derived from her own grief and made her recognize the importance of what Frankl (1946/2006) called the defiant power of the human spirit. She realized that some survivors not only could cope but also could rise above the horror of their circumstances and even find meaning in their suffering. Out of a growing passion in the phenomenon of meaning among Holocaust survivors, Shantall employed a heuristic approach by first exploring the phenomenon of meaning in suffering in her personal experience. She then sought to enter to the "life worlds" of Holocaust survivors by attending meetings of a survivor organization in Johannesburg, spending over two years as a participant observer. Shantall interviewed five survivors and analyzed their narratives, comparing them with the recorded narrative of the recognized Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl.

Three of the participants were child survivors who entered the camps as 13-year-olds; two entered the camps as adults in their late 20s. Four were female and one was male. The educational and social backgrounds of these five survivors varied greatly: from peasant and poor family circumstances to highly cultured and socially prominent backgrounds. Differing in age, sex, education level, and social standing, the survivors had the following important factors in common: All shared a happy childhood in close-knit, loving, and value-centered Jewish families and communities before the onset of the Holocaust. These families were practicing Jews but were not ultra-orthodox. All of the participants lost most of their family members in the Holocaust. The results of Shantall's (1999) study highlighted that meaning can be experienced in suffering if suffering is accepted as a challenge to overcome evil with good in the practice of those values that make life worthwhile. Core themes and patterns highlighted the following findings: When survivors were confronted with their suffering they were in a situation where they had to choose how they would act. Their sufferings brought them to face the reality that life no longer provided a sense of security and well-being. They were faced with the reality of choice either to choose the right, heroic, unselfish thing to do or to escape the sense of responsibility they felt and to think only of themselves and how they survived the suffering, even at the expense of others. As they became aware of what really mattered to them, they actively committed to the values in their lives and to preserve them at any cost. This attitude appeared to encourage, strengthen, and preserve them. They felt good about themselves in doing what they believed was right and as they were able to make costly moral choices, their suffering lost its sting and its dreadful threat. Their suffering caused them to experience a depth in their spirituality that they never experienced before and led them to greater psychological and spiritual

maturity. Living up to this level and dimension of meaning and making the right choices led them to experience real moments of victory and joy.

The present study duplicated Shantall's (1999) study. Since this study and Shantall's study share a common purpose for their research, this study included similar research questions to those Shantall used in her study. Research questions in Shantall's study included: What happened to trauma survivors during the Holocaust? How did they feel and cope at the time? What kept them going? How did they manage to survive? How did they come to terms with what happened to them? How do they feel now about their experiences during the Holocaust?

Similar questions were asked of Iraqi refugees using different methodology. It is worth comparing the results of this study with Shantall's results to observe any differences or common themes between them.

Meaning Making Grounded in Action

Although the sample in Shantall's 1999 study was relatively small, the findings are consistent with what Frankl (1946/2006) pointed to—humans are free to choose their attitude in any given set of circumstances. Perhaps the type of research questions, the heuristic inquiry method, and Shantall's passionate, disciplined commitment to persist with questions intensely and continuously until they were answered caused the researcher to obtain such rich findings.

In contrast to Shantall's (1999) sample size, Armour (2010) sought to examine meaning making among 133 Holocaust survivors during the Holocaust, after immigration to the United States, and as older adults. Armour (2003) focused on the theory of meaning making grounded in action. Holocaust survivors in this study were recruited from Jewish organizations in nine U.S. locations and consisted of 90 women (68%) and 43 men (32%). Nearly 41% of the sample were younger than 80, 41% were between 80 and 85 years old, and 18% were older than 85.

Survivors had immigrated to the United States over a period of many years, with 14% immigrating before and during World War II, 49% after the war until 1949, and 37% since 1950. The mean number of children per participant was 2.3, and all but 6% of the sample had children. Armour (2010) used a mixed-methods design with a survey that consisted of 188 semistructured questions and standardized measures to collect data on participants' demographics; their lives before, during, and after the Nazi occupation; sense making; forgiveness; resilience; Eriksonian life stages; survivorship characteristics; and aging. Interviews lasted for 2 to 2.5 hours using standardized measures to collect data. Measures used are as follows: (a) The Enright Forgiveness Inventory was used to assess domains of affect, behavior, and cognition toward the offending other, (b) The Coping with the Aftermath of the Holocaust Questionnaire was used to assess three types of coping: victims, fighters, and those who made it, (c) Data on Eriksonian Life Stages collected participants' self-assessments of their success completing tasks specific to Erikson's eight developmental stages, (d) Sense making was assessed by a single question—"have you been able to make any sense of losing your loved one(s)?" (e) Researchers also used the Perceptions of Other Survivors Questionnaire to create a hypothetical composite of a survivor and to explain survivorship (Armour, 2010). Participants' responses were audiotaped and analyzed by primarily focusing on themes related to the process of meaning making grounded in action. Armour (2010) also asked survivors about their ability to make meaning by making sense of the loss of their loved ones. The vast majority of participants (70%) were not able to make sense of their loss. Armour analyzed the qualitative data, and themes around actions and attitudes of survivors were generated over three time periods: during the Holocaust, after their immigration to the United States, and as older adults. During the time when survivors were under the Nazi regime, what mattered most was keeping themselves and hope alive.

Survivors stayed alive by refusing to consider the option of quitting, overcoming whatever threatened their survival, implementing creative solutions, and acting responsibly toward self and others. They kept hope alive by believing in liberation and attaching to personal fantasies of what the future might hold. They believed that the Holocaust was a time-limited nightmare that would have an end, their own life would go on, and a better time would come, including a reunion with their loved ones. During the second period of their settlement in the United States, the survivors' focus was on reconstructing their life and regaining what they had lost. They accomplished this by being proactive in their attitude, maintaining a sense of gratitude, having faith in self and God, acceptance, becoming free of bitterness, and doing whatever helped them to move forward in their life. They were pursuing education, building a family, and raising up children by being successful, working hard, leaving their past behind, and focusing on their present and future. The third period addressed survivors' current years as older people. As they grew older, survivors focused on maintaining their health to preserve their life, fulfilling their obligations to those who died and honoring them by contributing positively to the community, and taking a stand to fight hatred and oppression. They also expressed their sense of pride over what they had done to survive, viewing survivorship as a victory.

One of the limitations of Armour's (2010) study is the use of mixed-methods design using both a questionnaire and a limited qualitative interview. The use of mixed-method design may not give an opportunity for survivors to explore the experience of meaning in depth. Additionally, meaning was explored by focusing on meaning grounded in actions. Perhaps the focus particularly on the aspect of action may miss examination of other aspects of meaning making.

Types of Meaning Making

Themes similar to those found in Armour's study (2010) occurred in a qualitative narrative analysis study among another sample of Holocaust survivors. Meade (2011) sought to understand the role of meaning in the lives of 18 Holocaust survivors who experienced life in the ghetto and concentration camp between the ages of 8 and 12 by examining the types of meanings they created in their lives. The 10 females and eight males included in this sample were members of the Museum of Jewish Heritage Speaker's Bureau. They participated in semistructured interviews. Interview questions explored areas of coping, meaning, relationships, legacy, worldview, life purpose, mission, role, identity, agency, and transgenerational issues. The study explored how and whether meaning was connected to the Holocaust, how meaning had emerged in survivors' lives since the Holocaust, and the importance of meaning in the lives of survivors. Interviews were transcribed and verified. Six participants with a mix of gender, wartime setting, and country of origin were selected for analysis using 13 interviews. A narrative thematic analysis methodology was used to determine thematic forms of meaning. A total of 16 themes related to meaning emerged as being significant for six participants. There were three types of themes that were shared by more than one of these participants: the importance of speaking out about the Holocaust, the centrality of family, and the influence of religion in their lives. Even though these were common themes for two or more participants, each participant had differences in the significance and development of each of these themes. In addition, each participant had at least one theme that was highly personal to him or herself alone, such as the importance of being compassionate, the desire to become a medical doctor, and the appreciation of life itself. The study findings suggest the importance of the role of meaning making in the lives of some people who have endured an overwhelming traumatic experience

such as the Holocaust. The sample in Meade's study did make meaning of their experience during the Holocaust, while in Armour's (2010) study the majority of participants were not able to make sense of what happened to them. Perhaps this difference in findings—mainly the ability to make meaning out of the experience itself—is related to the difference in focus between both studies. The focus in Meade's study was on the meaning-making process through which human beings create an understanding of their encounters of the world, including activities that people employ in constructing and in making sense not only of the world but of themselves. In contrast, Armour's study focused on meaning in action. While qualitative studies among Holocaust survivors are informative to the trauma field, it is worth looking at qualitative studies among refugees to examine aspects of the process of meaning making that might be specific to this particular population.

Both Armour (2010) and Meade (2011) studied Holocaust survivors' experiences in childhood years and shortly thereafter, while in Shantall's (1999) study three participants were child survivors who entered the camps at 13 years old, and two entered the camps as adults in their late 20s. This study focused on adult Iraqi refugees age 30 and above. Compared to the trauma experienced by Holocaust survivors in the Nazi era, the Iraqis' experience of war trauma is relatively recent. This study focused on the Iraq War in 2003 and thereafter. In the studies by Armour and Meade, Holocaust survivors had an opportunity to describe their own personal narrative, and through this process, aspects of meaning making were revealed. The purpose of the studies conducted by Shantall, Armour, and Meade varies. Meade's study purpose was to understand the role of meaning by examining the types of meaning created. On the other hand, Armour's study focus was on the process of meaning making grounded in action. Shantall focused on how survivors experience meaning in their suffering. Although the three studies

varied in purpose, the results are encouraging and provide insight on meaning making as a coping strategy that helps survivors to adjust and move forward in their lives. This points to the need for further examination of how other trauma survivors experience meaning in their suffering. A wider perspective on understanding the phenomenon of meaning requires studying the phenomenon among various war survivors around the world. I believe that exploring the phenomenon of meaning among Iraqi refugees and giving them the opportunity that was given to Holocaust survivors to share their experience is more likely to validate the vital role that meaning making has in trauma recovery. Further, when trauma is found to be a shared experience among various groups of trauma survivors around the globe, it shifts the phenomenon of study focus from being an experience of an individual to an experience of a group of people as a whole. Exploring meaning making among various groups and recognizing common themes by listening to their individual experiences helps cultivate the attitude of surviving trauma through meaning making.

Meaning Making Among Refugees

Few studies among refugees have examined the phenomenon of meaning making in suffering. Refugees have been forced to leave their homeland and have experienced all kinds of violence and loss. Reviewing the existing literature on meaning making among refugees supported the need for further studies among refugees.

Meaning Making and Altruism

Frankl (1946/2006) proposed that people can find meaning in life through creativity, love, and suffering. Altruism among refugee populations has been explored as a manner of coping to find meaning in their past and present experiences. Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustions, and Somasundaram (2014) used an experience-centered narrative approach to

analyze the stories of 24 former refugees from two African countries (Sierra Leone, $n = 16$; Burundi, $n = 8$) who had resettled in South Australia. Participants were 10 men and 14 women, ages 18 to 56 years ($M = 38.5$), from both urban and rural origins in their home countries. Participants had been in Australia between 3 and 10 years and were recruited with the help of a resettlement agency or directly from the community. Puvimanasinghe et al. (2014) conducted interviews in English using a relatively unstructured interview guide containing an opening statement and several follow-up, open-ended questions. Interviews began with participants being asked to share their life story in a way they felt comfortable, and for ethical reasons interviewers did not pursue topics that brought discomfort or distress, attempting instead to facilitate storytelling. Participants from the two groups responded quite differently.

Puvimanasinghe et al. (2014) found that although all stories were mostly temporally sequenced, Sierra Leonean narratives contained vivid accounts of events and experiences accompanied by evaluative elements of thoughts and feelings. The Sierra Leonean narratives were also fairly proportionally distributed along their life storyline from their home country to the refugee camp to Australia. In contrast, Burundians' stories contained relatively sparse accounts of life in the home country and conflict-related experiences. Data analysis revealed altruism and helping behavior as a prominent and recurring theme of participants' narrated lives. Puvimanasinghe et al. (2014) found that this meta-theme encompassed four subthemes:

1. Surviving war and exile was through collective caring and sharing. Participants' narratives indicated that they were trying to make sense of the senselessness and loss that surrounded them in exile, and to some extent in Australia, through symbolic continuity of their communal self.

2. Adapting to Australian society occurred despite the distress of adjusting to a new culture (acculturation stress). Australian service providers served as role models for earlier arrivals who aspired to emulate their example by affording similar assistance to later newcomers from their home countries.

3. Connecting with their native country occurred through a sense of responsibility the participants felt towards elderly parents, extended family members, and friends overseas; the collective caring they described as built into them; and also, sometimes, a result of familial and social pressure. Some narratives also indicated that helping others alleviated their own distress stemming from the trauma of war, missing loved ones, and the guilt of leaving their homeland and community. In this sense, helping others played a healing role in participants' lives.

4. Meaning making occurred through religious beliefs. Helping, cooperating, and sharing were entwined with participants' coping strategies and meaning making of experience. Participants' narratives indicated that throughout their journeys from their home country to Australia, their steadfast religious faith had given them consolation and hope, and God continued to answer their prayers. In return—in reciprocity to God—they reached out to help others.

Some Sierra Leoneans, including two Muslim participants, attributed their overall life experiences to “God’s will” or “destiny,” and their evaluative accounts indicated how they were making sense of their suffering and hardship by maintaining a congruity between religious beliefs and the perception of their realities. This enabled them to cope with distress and simultaneously reach out to others. Participants’ narratives indicated that by attributing their life trajectories to “God’s will” and “destiny,” they were holding steadfastly to their globally held religious beliefs despite the severity and length of their traumatic experiences. They were also focusing on making sense of their positive experiences as well as their hardships. The attribution

of their survival and salvation to divine intervention appeared to strengthen their religious beliefs, which in turn afforded them with a coping mechanism to continue with life and maintain hope for the future.

One limitation mentioned in the Puvimanasinghe et al. (2014) study was related to the interviewing technique of avoiding direct questions about helping behaviors—unless it was to facilitate narration on what was volitionally introduced by a participant. This interviewing technique may have affected participants' responses as they might have attempted to create a favorable impression of themselves and their communities.

Refugees from different cultural contexts who survived war trauma may share common aspects of their experiences during the war with one another. Also, it is expected that differences in reporting their experiences do exist. Perhaps Iraqi refugees relate different trauma experiences and how trauma affected them compared to their counterparts, the African refugees. Puvimanasinghe et al.'s (2014) study focus was not mainly on understanding how the African refugees made meaning in their suffering; rather, the study explored altruism as a manner of coping to find meaning in past and present experiences. This study's main focus was to understand the phenomenon of meaning making in suffering. It was expected altruism might be found to be one aspect of the experience of meaning making. Possibly, like in Puvimanasinghe et al.'s (2014) study, religious beliefs might be regarded as a means through which Iraqi refugees make meaning. Further, Iraqi refugees' current legal status in Jordan as guests awaiting resettlement in a western country means they face a difficult living situation. Iraqi refugees in Jordan have very limited access to service providers, and they are not allowed to work. In contrast, African refugees who have already resettled in South Australia for over three years

have had a different experience of meaning in suffering compared to the Iraqi refugees in Jordan who are clinging to the hope of resettlement.

Coping Strategies and Meaning Making

While Puvimanasinghe et al.'s (2014) study's focus was to explore how refugees employed their coping resources and strategies to find meaning in their past and present experiences using an experience-centered narrative approach, the intention of Gregory and Prana's (2013) study was to provide sustainable and effective tools that would encourage and support continued growth and create meaning out of senseless and life-altering violence among participants. Gregory and Prana explored PTG among refugee citizens of Cote d'Ivoire (ages 18 to 56 years; $M = 37.4$ years) who were affected by living in asylum in Liberia ($M = 167.5$ days). Research focused on use of the Companion Recovery (CR) model as a means to educate participants on how to process trauma, focus on finding meaning, and implement positive change as a result of the traumatic struggles they experienced. The CR model provides education regarding trauma-focused interventions, highlighting the benefits of resilience and PTG. The CR model is composed of 10 modules shown to reduce symptoms of traumatic stress of individuals who have experienced profound catastrophic trauma. The 10 modules are placed in three sequential categories: (a) trauma impact reduction and education (overwhelming event, encapsulation, recognition), (b) resilience (release and resilience), (c) posttraumatic growth (new self, rebuilding community, and commencement).

The research question for the study was: Does the CR model enhance PTG in Ivorian refugees displaced to Liberia? Gregory and Prana (2013) hypothesized that the CR model would promote PTG in Ivorian participants and provide sustainable, effective tools that would encourage and support continued growth and create meaning. Gregory and Prana found that the

use of the CR model was instrumental in increasing PTG in participants. The results revealed that the participants' strong traditional beliefs had been practiced regularly; most participants had a strong faith system that was active and important to them. Gregory and Prana (2013) noted that the power of the human spirit to apply meaning and learn from terrible tragedy did not seem to be bound by culture but would need to be studied in future research. Although Gregory and Prana did not primarily focus on exploring how refugees make meaning out of their tragedy, it is quite informative that the concept of meaning making is of great importance in trauma recovery models. Further research that focuses on exploring how refugees experience meaning in tragedy would enhance models of trauma recovery. The research question for Gregory and Prana's (2013) study was: Does the CR model enhance PTG in Ivorian refugees displaced to Liberia? This study question's main focus was on understanding how Iraqi refugees make meaning in suffering. Studying the connection between the religious belief system of Iraqi refugees and meaning making in suffering informs the field of traumatology.

In a study similar to Puvimanasinghe et al.'s (2014) focus on coping among African refugees who resettled in South Australia, Clarke and Borders (2014) examined how Liberian women coped with refugee resettlement in the United States. The authors analyzed interviews of 10 women according to a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Participants ranged in ages from 24 to 59 years, with a mean age of 28. They left Liberia between 1990 and 1996, spending between nine and 14 years outside of Liberia prior to resettlement in the United States. Interview questions were designed to elicit the concrete details of experiences and defining moments along with related cognitions and emotions. The questions primarily focused on how the participants coped. Clarke and Borders (2014) transcribed, reviewed, and reflected on data in order to determine themes. They identified nine themes, grouped within three coping categories:

(a) adopting culturally sanctioned attitudes, such as being serious, working hard, and displaying gratitude as participants focused on the positive aspects of resettlement while maintaining their own cultural identity; (b) engaging with a new environment as they expressed a desire to take advantage of opportunities they did not have in their home country, particularly education and employment, and making efforts to engage systems in their new country; and (c) situating themselves in a narrative that made sense of their experiences by viewing their story as part of a spiritual plan that was taking place around them. Viewing their current difficulties in the light of their past experiences was one way that these women made sense of their circumstances. Having been through struggle was a motivating factor to create a hopeful future-oriented narrative.

Although the focus of Clarke and Borders's (2014) study was not primarily on meaning making but on coping, participants made sense of what happened to them through the spiritual framework they applied to their life narratives, attempting to answer the question, "How and why did that happen to me?" As they described their past, present, and future as the work of spiritual forces, they explained their belief that bad things happened because of curses by evil spirits, while good things were the work of God.

Coping Among Youth Refugees

Similar to Clarke and Borders's (2014) study, Goodman (2016) found through qualitative research that young Sudanese refugees positioned themselves in a spiritual narrative that helped them make sense of their experience. Implications of Goodman's study included the need for counselors to use holistic and advocacy-based counseling approaches and to facilitate coping by cultural meaning making of experiences. Refugees are at high risk for mental health problems, and refugee children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable (Goodman, 2016). Among refugee children, those who are unaccompanied by adults are at highest risk for mental health

issues because of the interplay between traumatic experiences and separation from significant emotional relationships. In studying unaccompanied refugee populations, Goodman aimed to explore how unaccompanied minor refugee youths who grew up amidst violence and loss coped with trauma and hardships in their lives. Specific aims were to identify the strategies which refugee youth used to cope and to examine the effectiveness of those strategies. A case-centered, comparative, narrative approach was used to analyze the narratives of 14 male unaccompanied refugee youths, ages 16 to 18, from the Dinka tribe of southern Sudan and recently resettled in the United States. Goodman conducted interviews using an unstructured interview guide consisting of broad, open-ended questions designed to elicit each adolescent's story. Narratives were analyzed for both content and form, and four themes emerged that reflect coping strategies used by the participants: (a) collectivity and the communal self, (b) suppression and distraction, (c) making meaning, and (d) emerging from hopelessness to hope. The findings underscore the importance of understanding cultural variations in responses to trauma and are discussed in relation to the concept of resilience.

The participants' narratives revealed the atrocity of trauma and suffering that they experienced and what enabled their survival (Goodman, 2016). The content and structure of the narratives depicted the ways in which the participants coped with the trauma and hardships of their lives. Most of the participants readily accepted their life circumstances as God's will rather than struggle with questions about why God would allow them to live while others died. Attributing death to God's will provided an answer that gave them some peace and enabled participants to avoid thinking about the reasons for or meaning of the suffering all around them. Some of the participants expressed beliefs that provided meaning and the reason to resist despair. The study narratives presented the progression from hopelessness to hope in the participants'

lives. The hopelessness that the refugees experienced throughout their flight from Sudan and during the many years in a refugee camp was compared with the hope that life in the United States held for them. The participants found meaning in their cultural and religious beliefs regarding suffering and life (Goodman, 2016). Interpretation of events as God's will helped the participants cope by giving order to the disruption and chaos of their lives. Believing that one's life had purpose, whether to represent one's family or to help others in the future, provided meaning and helped participants resist despair. These beliefs facilitated coping by helping the refugees make sense out of their experiences and by facilitating the suppression of thoughts and feelings, as discussed previously. Listening to refugees' beliefs and the ways they made sense of their experiences provided insight into how they managed difficulties and how they ordered their world. Related to meaning making is the transition from hopelessness to hope experienced by the participants (Goodman, 2016). Hope in the future became a major motivation for survival and helped participants endure the trials of the refugee camps.

While meaning was found among resilient children who employed adaptive functioning and psychological health in Goodman's (2016) study, a qualitative study by Levey et al. (2016) aimed to identify factors contributing to resilience among youth in post-conflict Liberia. Purposive samples of 75 young people (ages 13–18) in the capital city of Monrovia, Liberia, were recruited in 2012. Levey et al. (2016) conducted semistructured interviews and collected demographic data. In-depth interviews were used to collect data in order to capture the personal narratives of individual children. Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically. Results showed that 46 of the participants were attending school, and 29 were not enrolled in school. Youth enrolled in school demonstrated greater adaptive functioning. This was particularly true for boys in any school setting and girls attending private school. Youth not attending school

were more likely to have lost family members or to be estranged from them, and many were also engaging in substance use. Participants who displayed resilient outcomes demonstrated emotion regulation, cognitive flexibility, agency, social intelligence, and, in some cases, meaning making. Children described a variety of systems of meaning, including religious beliefs, traditional beliefs, and moral codes of behavior. All of the children interviewed in this study endorsed having a religious identity, either Christian or Muslim. They prayed to God for good things to happen to them in the future. Many said things like, “God will make everything possible. I know God will lift me up for my tomorrow” (Levey et al., 2016, p. 7). Upon closer examination, however, the children were actually saying quite different things. For some, their belief system contained the idea that their lives mattered, God loved them, and they had the power to make things happen for themselves. For others, their belief in a higher power reinforced their sense of helplessness. They could do nothing for themselves and instead had to wait for a more powerful being to rescue them from their suffering. Levey et al. (2016) found that children whose belief systems reinforced their agency showed more adaptive functioning. For these children, their ideas about meaning supported their sense of agency and their ability to impact their own lives and the lives of others. Although both studies (Goodman, 2016; Levey et al., 2016) were employed among younger age samples with fewer verbal abilities than adults have, the studies inform of the usefulness of approaches that allow researchers to hear the voices of the participants. This study’s main focus was on how Iraqi refugees make meaning out of their suffering. In contrast, Goodman’s (2016) study focus was on how the unaccompanied male youth Sudanese who resettled in the United States coped with their trauma and hardship. Meaning making was found to be one of four themes that answered the research question among participants. The meaning-making theme was experienced through belief in the power of God’s

will. While the purpose of Levey et al.'s (2016) study was not primarily focused on the experience of meaning making among the youth, children were able to describe a variety of systems of meaning. Religious beliefs and moral codes of behavior were found to be among systems of meaning. It was expected that part of the Iraqi refugees' answer to the research question concerning how they make meaning in the wake of their suffering might include components related to their religious beliefs. The main question of the present study revolves around exploring meaning making, thus allowing for more comprehensive and in-depth description of the experience of meaning making. On the other hand, the Levey et al. (2016) study explored experiences of Liberian youth who stayed in Liberia post-conflict and war. Their experience was limited to the war conflict and atrocities but not to the experience of being a refugee. Levey et al.'s (2016) study findings point out that there was a notable difference between children who had a stable environment postwar and those who did not. Children who had stable support figures postwar had help in coping with their traumatic memories, while children with emotionally dysfunctional caregivers experienced episodes of dysregulation themselves. Recovery of traumatized children is highly important and is possible when they have stable caregivers. The present study among adult Iraqi refugees facilitates the recovery of adult refugees, many of whom are caregivers of children and their extended families. The recovery of traumatized adults is essential to the recovery of children, families, and communities as a whole.

A qualitative approach among adult Iraqi refugees enhanced understanding of their experience of meaning making. The findings of Goodman (2016) and Levey et al. (2016) underscore that when working with refugees, it is crucial to understand the cultural aspects of

trauma, symptoms, and coping, and to consider culturally based strengths rather than focusing on pathology.

Methodology

In many cases, traumatic events among veterans, Holocaust survivors, or refugees rarely include one single traumatic event; rather war survivors experience multiple traumatic and stressful events. Having an open-ended research question which participants answer themselves in their own voices allowed better understanding of the process of meaning making (Shantall, 1999). Qualitative inquiry can broaden understanding and perspective on the experience of meaning among refugees. Qualitative data can enrich or complement quantitative findings by focusing on participants' narratives. Such evidence can facilitate redefinition of terms and permit new insights into the experience of meaning in war trauma, in particular among Iraqi refugees.

Subjectivity of Meaning Making Concept

According to Park and Folkman (1997), there is great diversity in the conceptual and operational approaches of meaning used in the context of coping and adjustment to stressful life events and conditions. Park and Folkman demonstrated that the concept of meaning refers to several perspectives, such as a general life orientation, personal significance, the process of making causal attributions about why an event occurred, finding redeeming or transcendent features in the event, and as an outcome of the process of adjustment to trauma. These various perspectives on meaning are reflected in diverse operational definitions (Park & Folkman, 1997). According to Taylor (1983), the attempt to find meaning discloses itself in two ways: a causal explanation that provides an answer to the question of why it happened, and how the event has impacted one's life. When positive meaning can be construed from the threatening experience,

Taylor found that it produces significantly better psychological adjustment among cancer patients. The focus on meaning emphasizes a more subjective perspective.

Importance of Qualitative Inquiry

This chapter discussed how in most cases meaning was not the central issue in the study, but part of a larger study design. Based on the findings in these studies, it is not clear if meaning changes over time. The use of different instruments to measure meaning or appraisals of war experiences makes it difficult to compare results. Most studies have used self-constructed instruments based on empirically gathered information (Aldwin et al., 1994; Britt et al., 2001), or coded qualitative data for statistical analyses (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1998). Studying Iraqi refugees qualitatively broadens current knowledge of the process in which individuals attempt to find meaning from their encounters with life's tragedies. Asking Iraqi refugees how they can make meaning in their suffering provided more insight on coping mechanisms from a personal point of view and revealed more about positive and negative outcomes related to stressful and threatening events and domains of change. Given the growing number of refugees, the conflicts occurring around the world, and the need for comprehensive interventions that address multiple areas of life to facilitate refugees' recovery and adjustment, researchers and clinicians urgently need to give attention to how refugees make meaning from trauma. While there has been an increase of research in the realm of meaning making and trauma in recent years, several gaps in the literature still remain. Though it is clear that meaning making is a vital internal resource that helps foster coping and the creation of hope, no empirical studies with an explicit emphasis on Iraqi refugees' experiences had been conducted. Neither quantitative nor qualitative studies had been conducted among Iraqi refugees on meaning making in suffering; this study filled that gap in the existing research literature. Engaging in this area of research can provide important

information to help mental health professionals working with Iraqi refugees. This study communicates hope to war and torture survivors. It also provides hope and help for mental health professionals who are frustrated by the continuous suffering of their patients and the lack of available resources. In addition, the study provides information to help expand effective treatment of the human spirit and the dignity of Arab refugees in particular, and for all those who suffer and have lost meaning and hope in life.

Chapter Summary

A number of empirical studies address the concept of meaning making in the context of war trauma. The literature clarifies that veterans, Holocaust survivors, and refugees do report positive change after trauma, and aspects of meaning making have been identified as affecting posttrauma adjustment. Additionally, there has been limited research on understanding how trauma survivors, particularly refugees, make meaning in their suffering. These empirical studies are mostly quantitative inquiries; few qualitative studies have been identified, particularly among refugees. Notably, there has not been a qualitative study concerning Iraqi refugees. Clearly, meaning making is crucial to posttraumatic adjustment and recovery. Research has not explored the process of meaning making among refugees. Mental health professionals who offer direct care to refugees need to be able to provide more comprehensive assistance. In order to understand how meaning making is experienced among Iraqi refugees, the methodology of this study allowed refugees to share their experience of meaning in suffering and how this has helped them to adjust after trauma. Chapter Three presents a detailed description of the phenomenological qualitative research method used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in the wake of their suffering. A qualitative phenomenological design was an ideal method to provide understanding of the phenomenon of meaning in suffering among participants in this study.

This chapter will review various areas related to research methodology. I will describe the research design, provide an explanation of my own position and role in the research, and outline the process of selecting and recruiting the participants. Next, I will provide a review of the research questions and an outline of the processes for data collection and analysis. Issues related to the credibility and validity of the study will then be explored. Finally, I will discuss the ethical implications of this research and conclude with a chapter summary.

Research Design

Bruner (2002) described two broad styles of knowing: paradigmatic and narrative. Paradigmatic knowing is associated with positivist physical sciences and seeks to explain cause-and-effect relationships. In contrast, narrative knowing is associated with everyday accounts of human action, usually in the form of stories (Bruner, 2002). Understanding the meaning of the phenomenon being studied requires utilizing qualitative analysis methods of narrative data that are different from quantitative methods of research. Thus, a qualitative method's primary aim is to provide an understanding of how the social world is constructed. Specifically, van Manen (1994) argued that phenomenology aims to reduce people's experiences of a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence, a grasp of the very nature of the thing. Albright et al. (2008) asserted that close attention to trauma narratives can aid in studying the impact of trauma

on survivors. They highlighted the need to further develop qualitative knowledge and competence to provide a deeper understanding of the lives of trauma survivors. Qualitative research serves to explore the questions quantitative research is inherently unable to (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative inquiry can provide insight into how adult Iraqi refugees make meaning in their suffering. Current literature suggests that meaning-making is an essential part of recovery from trauma (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Park & Folkman, 1997) but there was still a gap in the literature in explaining the process of meaning-making among refugees and particularly among adult Iraqi refugees. No previous research focused on the experience of meaning-making in the aftermath of trauma among Iraqi refugees. The purpose of this study was to listen to the voices of Iraqi refugees in order to grasp the very nature of their lived experience. Humans' internal experiences cannot be measured merely by observation or employing quantitative measures (Black, 2008). To reach a deeper understanding of the experience of meaning for Iraqi refugees who have survived trauma, it is necessary to engage them in a conversational dialogue to facilitate their subjective narrative of the experience. Thus, qualitative inquiry was the most appropriate methodology for investigating the research questions of this study. I believe that results of this study help inform current research and interventions that foster trauma recovery.

This study employed a phenomenological design. According to Moustakas (1994), researchers in phenomenological design complete a systematic data analysis of significant statements and themes that are relevant to the phenomenon of investigation, in this case, the phenomenon of meaning in suffering. The goal of following this process is to create a structural description of the common themes among participants' narratives to grasp the essence of the phenomenon being investigated. Researchers are required to approach the phenomenon of investigation with fresh perspective by bracketing their own assumptions and refraining from

adding their own judgment about the phenomenon to understand it through the eyes of those who have direct experience with it (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers need to carefully select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon rather than simply those who have perspectives on the experience (Creswell, 2007). Thus, this study sought to describe the experience of meaning-making of Iraqi refugees by using interviews to understand the life-world of a participant and searching for collective perspectives across participants (Wertz, 2005).

About the Researcher

As a Jordanian psychosocial counselor, I have worked with refugees who have survived war trauma over a period of four years. For the first two of these years, I worked as a psychosocial counselor and had direct contact with Syrian and Iraqi refugees at the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) in Jordan. My work included conducting thorough assessments, providing individual and group counseling sessions, and completing follow-up assessments over the course of one year from the first session date. I have worked with children, adolescents, and adults of both genders and of various religious backgrounds (e.g., Muslim, Christian, and Sabian). I have listened over and over to the stories of the many clients who have survived war and torture trauma. Refugees who were forcibly displaced from their home country and fled to Jordan seeking safety shared how this experience has impacted them and their families psychologically, physically, and socially. I have noticed how refugees and, in particular, Iraqi refugees who are less fortunate because of the limited available social services struggle to survive in difficult living circumstances. I have noticed a blend of vulnerability and resiliency in those refugees. Because of this observation, a deep passion has developed in me to understand how human beings, in this case Iraqi refugees, maintain hope and purpose in their suffering. Over the last three years I have been working as a psychotherapist trainer at CVT. Part of my

work is to provide supervision for other psychosocial counselors and to observe individual and group therapy sessions. I have listened to and continue to listen to many heart-wrenching stories of traumatic experience and loss. These profound stories have stirred my desire to understand how one could maintain hope and purpose in the face of suffering and loss. I want to understand what helps and gives hope to refugees who have experienced trauma and continue to suffer aftermath trauma such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Stressors are not limited to psychological symptoms related to their trauma, but include the various stressors they face day after day because they lack financial resources. Minimal financial resources and limited access to social services has negatively affected their living conditions, ability to access health care services, housing, education, and social life. Observing the multitude difficulties these refugees face has led me to search for new ways to understand the problem of evil in the world and the phenomenon of hope. When trauma survivors make sense of their trauma, they can begin the healing process and grasp a sense of freedom and purpose in life. Herman (1992) suggested that when survivors recognize the truth of their experience, they can begin their recovery.

I believe that the question of how refugees who survived war trauma find meaning can be answered best from the personal experience of the survivors themselves by conducting a dialogue (Moustakas, 1990). In my practice, I have noticed how the clients demonstrated resiliency and unique abilities to cope with their pain and suffering. Although the concept of meaning in suffering remains inadequately addressed in therapy sessions with these clients, I have noticed that some of them have pointed to the experience of meaning in their suffering and the use of spirituality, hope, PTG, and finding new opportunities in life as a means of making sense of their trauma and painful memories. I have noticed that the core question that they struggle to answer and understand is why such evil practices have afflicted them. Why in

particular this has happened to them while they are innocent? Having the opportunity to taste part of the pain of suffering that my clients experience by listening to their traumatic stories, and how they affected them, has increased my understanding of myself, which has helped me to empathize and connect with humanity in a meaningful way.

As an individual, I am aware that my assumptions about the phenomenon of meaning in suffering have been shaped by my Christian worldview. I am also aware that other religious traditions may contradict my own assumptions. I became familiar with the literature on the phenomenon of meaning in suffering among war survivors. This research has expanded my knowledge and has shaped what I already knew about the phenomenon. I am aware that aspects of the phenomenon of meaning in suffering remain mysterious and that individual experiences are unique. Although each individual experience is unique, I believe that human suffering and the search for meaning in suffering are universal phenomena. I am aware that I am not an unbiased being and that my cultural worldviews have an influence on my understanding of these concepts.

I believe finding meaning in suffering has the potential to lead to recovery from trauma. I have encountered pain in my life; I have raised questions about meaning in suffering, and I have searched for answers. As a Christian, I believe that humans are created in the image of God and that hope and meaning in life are reflected in that image. However, I also believe that humans have the freedom to make choices. Evil is a universal problem, and humans in their free will can choose to participate in evil acts toward creation, including toward human beings. Humans have the choice to determine how they will respond to their pain and suffering. They can choose to rise above the horror of evil acts and even find meaning in their suffering. This is what Frankl (1946/2006) called the defiant power of the human spirit. Human spirituality

reflects the image of God in humans, and life becomes meaningful and purposeful when humans' souls seek the creator of the universe, the source of meaning, purpose and life. I believe that God is the source of every good gift, including the human search for meaning in suffering. My ultimate research goal is to explicate the essence of the phenomenon of meaning in suffering as it exists in the participants' concrete experiences (McLeod, 2011). I believe listening to Iraqi refugees who have direct experience with the phenomenon of meaning in suffering added to my knowledge and filled a gap in literature by answering the research question: How do adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning in the wake of their suffering?

Interview Questions

The interview included the following questions:

- Please share as much as you feel comfortable with about your experience as an Iraqi refugee during the 2003 Iraq War.
- How did you feel and cope at that time?
- What kept you going?
- How did you manage to survive?
- What feelings do you have now when you think about your past experience?
- What, if anything, positive emerged from your experience with suffering?
- How, if at all, do you experience meaning and hope in the wake of your suffering
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Selection of Participants

This phenomenological study was designed to explain how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in the midst of their suffering. The research design incorporated a purposeful sample of three adult Iraqi refugees. Purposeful sampling is the

strategy of selecting participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation and can explore it (Creswell, 2007). According to van Manen (2014), purposeful sampling is used to select participants based on their knowledge and verbal eloquence to describe a group or sub-culture to which they belong.

I interviewed three adult male Iraqi refugees who live in Amman, Jordan. Participants were recruited for this study from CVT in Amman. CVT is a humanitarian organization in Jordan that provides specialized services to refugees who fled to Jordan. CVT provides mental health, physical therapy, and social services to help refugees to restore their dignity and hope and move forward in their lives. Mental health services include individual and group psychotherapy. Follow-up assessments are conducted at three-, six-, and 12-month intervals to monitor clients' progress. I interviewed three Iraqi refugees who met the following criteria:

- were ages of 30 or older,
- were in Iraq for at least part of the 2003 Iraq War,
- have experienced war trauma,
- have immigrated to Jordan seeking refuge,
- have consent on file with CVT for their data to be used for research purposes and to participate in research,
- haave completed individual and/or group therapy, and
- have completed a six- or 12-month follow-up assessment.

Exclusion criteria aim to prevent impact from the researcher on the clients and vice versa. For this research, all clients whose group or individual therapy sessions I have supervised were excluded from participating. This way, clients can freely share their experience without feeling any pressure to please the researcher and can withdraw from the study if they choose to without

feeling obligated to participate. In addition, excluding my previous clients allowed me to remain open and approach the participants with fresh perspective, as it was my first time meeting with them.

I chose participants who had completed therapy and were at the phase of six- or 12-month follow-up assessment so that I can ensure that they are psychologically stable and their PTSD symptoms are alleviated. If any subjects had experienced any related trauma symptoms, I was prepared to provide them with psychotherapists' names outside of CVT so that they could choose one of them to be referred to. In addition, I was prepared to cover the cost of the therapy session(s), including the cost of transportation.

In addition, it is possible that time can facilitate finding meaning (Murphy, Johnson, & Lohan, 2003). I believe that adults of both males and females can answer questions related to the experience of meaning in life.

I used data from the Monitoring and Evaluation department at CVT to obtain a list of clients who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria mentioned above. I selected the sample randomly by drawing numbers which were assigned to each individual. Those who were selected from the list were contacted using a phone number that was intended to be used only for research purposes. I followed predetermined initial contact procedures (see Appendix D). I introduced myself to the potential participants, informed them that I obtained their names from CVT data, and asked them if they would be interested in participating in the study. I explained the purpose of the study and the procedures of the research in detail. I made every effort to ensure that all data collected would remain confidential. Those who came to the interview were paid for the cost of their transportation.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this section, I will explain the process and the steps that were followed in this study by providing an overview of data collection and analysis. This overview will discuss the methods that will be used for data collection. The various validation strategies that I used for this study to be rigorous and credible will be explained.

Interviews

Before conducting each interview, I introduced myself and presented some background information about the study in order to facilitate participation. I explained the purpose and benefits of the study, including how it could have impacted the participants positively. I explained the structure of the interview, which included asking the client questions, audio-recording their answers, and giving them the opportunity to ask any questions. Each participant was provided with a consent form in Arabic (see Appendix A). The consent was provided to ensure participants' confidentiality and informed the participants of the research boundaries and possible risks. Possible risks included emotional distress when participants remember their trauma. The consent informed the participants that the interviewer was a psychotherapist and was able to handle their emotional state and provide them psychological support if it were needed as a result of the interview. The consent informed participants that participating in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. A demographic data form was used to gather background information and data relevant to the selection criteria. Demographic data were used to identify each participant's age, gender, education, marital status, number of children, ethnicity, religion, and date of arrival to Jordan. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. I took notes during the interview. Participants were be informed that to protect their identity, they needed to provide a pseudonym.

I conducted a semistructured interview using an interview guide (see Appendix B) with each participant that lasted one to two hours in a comfortable, safe location. This amount of time allowed each participant to tell his story (Moustakas, 1990). This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participants to engage in dialogue whereby the initial questions can be modified in light of the participants' responses, and the investigator can probe interesting and important areas that arise (Smith & Osborn, 2007). I assumed that adults age 30 and above are capable of answering the interview questions and would be able to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings clearly. In addition, they were able to gain insight when they engage with their own experience, and the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of how the participants maintain hope and experience meaningful life in the face of their suffering. Since my focus was on refugees who have survived trauma, I only interviewed those refugees who left Iraq involuntarily after the Iraq War began in 2003.

Data Storage

The interview tapes, transcripts, field notes, and all translations were kept in a password-protected confidential computer file in my computer, as well as on a password-protected flash drive. The flash drive and all study-related materials were kept in a locked filing cabinet. All digital recordings were destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

Data Analysis

Since the participants responded to the questions in Arabic, after the interviews were completed, I had an experienced translator who is fluent in both Arabic and English translate the transcripts from Arabic to English. After the interviews were translated and transcribed, I listened to the audio recordings in Arabic and compared the recordings with the transcribed data in English. This process helped me to become familiar with the data. I read and repeatedly

reread the transcripts in English, looking for themes and patterns that emerged both within and across interviews. I followed the procedures of phenomenal analysis that Moustakas (1994) suggested. The procedures include horizontalizing the data and considering every horizon or statement relevant to the research topic and questions as having the same value. Horizontalizing can be reached by testing each statement whether (a) it contains a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient component for understanding it? (b) it is possible to abstract and label it

After I horizontalized the data statements, I listed the meaning or meaning units. These units were clustered into common categories or themes while excluding overlapping and repetitive statements. I used the clustered themes and meanings to develop the textural descriptions of the phenomenon. From the textural descriptions, I constructed structural descriptions and integrated textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon.

Adequacy of Data

I interviewed three participants who could answer the research questions in depth. My goal through interviews was to reach thematic data saturation where there are no new ideas or information emerging in the data (Bowen, 2008; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Therefore, data saturation is best described as data adequacy, which means that there is no new information is obtained (Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). If data saturation had not been achieved, I would have interviewed more participants until I was able to detect thematic patterns. Morrow (2005) pointed out that although having a sufficient number of research participants is important, mere numbers do not guarantee that the researcher will achieve adequate amounts of evidence. Patton (1990) suggested that the richness of the information from the cases selected and the

observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher have more to do with the quality of the data than the sample size. Therefore, what matters more in phenomenology inquiry is how many times the phenomenon has been repeated in the description of the narrative (Giorgi, 2009).

Morrow (2005) found that a sample size of 12 is as effective as any other size. Since phenomenological inquiry is based upon depth strategies, the difference between using, for example, five and 20 participants may be minimal (Englander, 2012).

Typically, data are gathered until there is no new information coming from new data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Ultimately, what is far more important than sample size are sampling procedures; quality, length, and depth of interview data; and variety of evidence (Morrow, 2005). Participants in this study were selected purposefully based on specific criteria to provide the most information-rich data possible.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers utilize various validation strategies to make their studies credible and rigorous (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Using the most common validation strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability gave the study trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Credibility

In order to achieve credibility, I conducted member checking. At the end of each interview, I summarized the themes that emerged from the interview and shared them with the participants. I asked them what they made of these ideas and about their experience being interviewed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, as cited in McLeod, 2011). Evidence for the truthfulness and catalytic validity of the process can be reached if participants' replies indicate that the interview made them think or helped them to understand their experience in a new way

(Stiles, 1993). Participants shared that they felt comfortable after the interview because they felt they had been listened to and understood by the researcher.

Thick descriptions of the data can enhance credibility too. I provided detailed rich descriptions of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of meaning in suffering and the contexts in which those experiences occurred (Morrow, 2005). The study achieved rich description by presenting the participants' voices under each theme and by providing a detailed description of each of the cases.

In order to discover meaning in the data, the researcher needs to approach the phenomena under investigation with an attitude open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge (Giorgi, 2011; Lopez & Willis, 2004). To prevent the researcher from using personal knowledge, Husserl (as cited in Chamberlain, 2009) suggested the use of a technique called bracketing, which is setting aside of what one already knows about a given phenomenon. Bracketing requires researchers to put aside their collections of knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences in order to accurately describe participants' life experiences (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Through the fundamental methodology of bracketing, the researcher's own experiences do not influence the participants' understanding of the phenomenon. Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research, being aware of one's own values, interests, perceptions, and thoughts become a prerequisite to setting aside the things that influence the research process. Such awareness is developed through reflexivity.

Reflexivity involves the ability of researchers to be aware of their own values, thoughts, interests, and perceptions before initiating the research process (Chan et al., 2013). However, Crotty (as cited in Chan et al., 2013) pointed out that it is not humanly possible for qualitative researchers to be totally objective. Reflexivity is a key thinking activity that helps researchers

identify the potential influence of their preexisting thoughts throughout the research process.

Wall, Glenn, Hutchinson, and Poole (2004) suggested using a reflexive diary to develop bracketing skills and facilitate decision-making during the progress of a phenomenological investigation. To develop reflexivity, I used a reflexive diary to write down my own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the phenomenon of meaning in suffering. Using this diary helped me to reexamine my position when issues were raised that could have affected the research process. Morrow (2005) recommended the use of multiple data sources as another way of enhancing credibility. The data were triangulated with the various forms of data collected in this study (i.e., interviews, reflective journal entries, participant checks, and field notes).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the possibility of applying findings to other settings or groups (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Transferability can be achieved when the researcher provides sufficient information about the self; the research context, processes, and participants; and researcher-participant relationships to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer (Morrow, 2005). I have provided information about myself as a researcher and about the context of the study, the process, and participants in previous sections. I am aware that the findings of this study do not suggest that the findings can be generalized to other populations or settings.

Dependability

Dependability is accomplished through carefully tracking the emerging research design and through keeping an audit trail, that is, a detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos (Morrow, 2005). I continuously shared with my advisor as I

completed the steps of my research activities. I consulted my advisor over any issues that arose. I compared the study findings with existing theory and research with the goal of understanding how they might inform the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is based on the acknowledgment that research is never objective (Morrow, 2005). In order to ensure that findings of the study represent the phenomenon of meaning among the participants themselves rather than my own beliefs or biases, I chose to use member checking during and after each interview to ensure the validity of the data (Black, 2008). I have shared with them the emergent themes and I asked them to respond, correct, and add any information they wished to. All of the participants were Muslim, but I remained aware of my own biases and where I stand on the issue of meaning-making and hope in suffering as a Christian who holds a Christian worldview of pain and suffering. I used bracketing to differentiate my worldview from that of the research participants.

Member Checking

I followed the member checking technique during the interview process and at the end of the interview to ensure the credibility and validity of the study. I built good rapport with the participants from the time of my initial contact with them. I followed precisely the procedures of initial contact (Appendix D) by introducing myself, comforting them by providing clear information on how I obtained their contact information before they asked, while ensuring the participants felt comfortable and interested to proceed the conversation on the phone. In addition, participants' positive experience with CVT improved their trust in me as an employee of CVT. I also made sure that the process of travelling to CVT by taxi went smoothly and felt comfortable for them. Welcoming them when they arrived, spending some time chatting before

the interview, and showing hospitality increased their level of trust, and they felt more comfortable. In addition, explaining the consent form and giving them space to ask any questions raised their level of trust and allowed them to feel comfortable enough to agree to initiate the interview. Good rapport with participants helped them to share their experiences openly. The trusting relationship helped them to express their feelings, open their hearts, and even cry. During the interview, I constantly checked my understanding of the phenomenon by utilizing techniques such as paraphrasing and summarization for clarification. I also asked questions to receive more clarification and accuracy. When appropriate, I provided them empathy and space to express various emotions. Additionally, at the end of each interview, I summarized their story and shared with them emerged themes, thoughts, ideas and feelings. Participants affirmed that the summaries reflected their views, feelings, and experiences.

Participants also affirmed their sense of relief at having shared information they do not share with others. They expressed that they felt that a burden was lifted because they found someone to understand them. In fact, Al-Shaker stated during the interview that one of reasons he agreed to participate in the study is that he needed to share his burden with someone else. At the end of the interview, Bashar Mahmoud expressed his sense of relief at having someone listen to him without judging him. Al-Nasr al-Abyad mentioned during the interview that he remembered and talked about things that he wanted to forget. At the end of the interview, I thanked him and commented on how enriching the information he shared was. He responded, “If it was useful for you, then I would leave happy. I would feel that I did something.” They all left feeling comfortable and relieved, and none of them expressed a need for a referral for external psychological support. After each interview on the same day, I called each participant to check on him and ensure his safe arrival back at home. All participants shared that they felt

thankful to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations

All the participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the American Counseling Association (2014) and the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Potential risks and benefits of this study were included in the informed consent.

Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions for further clarification before they signed the consent form. Although there are no identifiable risks for participating in this study, several considerations were kept in mind when dealing with Iraqi refugees. Participants might have feared sharing for political reasons. I ensured their anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, they were informed that they were free to share to whatever extent they feel comfortable. Possible risks included experiencing emotional distress when participants remembered their trauma. There was a possibility that during the interview these participants could feel emotionally overwhelmed and experience psychological distress. I provided support and empathy, as I have experience in treating war trauma. If they needed further help, I would have referred them to an experienced therapist not working at CVT. All data related to this study were secured in a locked cabinet and password-protected computer data file. All audio recorded interviews will be destroyed at the conclusion of this study. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntarily and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Approved Revisions

Audio Transcription

In the initial proposal, I planned to conduct interviews in Arabic and then have the audio data transcribed. Following the transcription of the data, I planned to carefully compare the transcribed data (Arabic version) with the audio data to ensure accuracy. The Arabic-version

transcripts would be translated into English by an experienced translator who is fluent in both English and Arabic, and I would have compared the English-translated version with the Arabic to ensure that the original meaning was preserved.

Changes to the original proposal were approved by the IRB. An experienced translator directly translated the Arabic audible data into English rather than transcribing the audible data and then translating it into English. I compared the Arabic audio data with the English translation to ensure that the original meaning was preserved. The rationale for this change is it saved me a significant time and effort without affecting the results. I was able to compare the audio-recorded Arabic with the English-version transcription to ensure accuracy and that the original meaning of the data was preserved.

Sample Size

Due to the lengthy amount of time it took to obtain CVT approval, which limited the time I had remaining to complete the PhD program, the chair of the committee suggested a change to this study. This change include conducting a pilot phenomenology study in which three participants were interviewed rather than conducting a full study and interviewing 10 participants. Interviewing three participants provided a significant amount of data, and findings reached saturation of data with the support provided through data “triangulation.” More details are included in Chapter Five.

Member Checking

The results of this study were intended to be shared with the participants themselves in the form of an Arabic transcription so that they could ensure its validity, as they were the ones who were eligible to adequately validate the results as being representative of their experience (Black, 2008). This process was changed in that I took adequate time after each interview to

share with each participant emerging themes and gain their approval of the accuracy of the shared data. Sharing with the participants the transcripts of their original work would have required translating all the English transcripts into Arabic, which would have required extensive time and effort.

Summary

The present study was intended to understand how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in their suffering. This chapter provided an overview of the qualitative phenomenology approach selected for this study. Relevant information about the researcher is included in this chapter to bracket my own preconceptions and experience with the phenomenon of meaning in suffering. Specific questions that guided the study interviews were presented followed by a description of the process of selecting participants and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data. Finally, this chapter discussed issues related to trustworthiness followed by ethical considerations that effect the credibility of this study. The following chapter will present the study findings and how participants answer the interview questions listed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Overview

This phenomenological study sought to explore and understand how meaning-making and purpose can still be experienced in the midst of suffering by examining the experiences of those who participated in a semistructured interview. Data from three adult Iraqi refugees were obtained through their participation in semistructured interviews and from the personal journals of the researcher. The participants' interviews were recorded in Arabic, and a translator transcribed them into English. At the end of each interview, the researcher reviewed the data and emerging themes with each participant to check for accuracy and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). Chapter Three provided a detailed summary of the process by which data were gathered, recorded, and analyzed. In keeping with phenomenological methods of analysis, the data collection followed an eight-step procedure that was recommended by Moustakas (1990). In brief, this process involves reviewing the transcripts and representing the collection of themes and descriptions collected from the interviews as well as the researcher's reflexive journal. The journal serves as another source and method of data collection and strengthens the interview data.

Chapter One of this dissertation provided an introduction to the topic of the experience of meaning-making and purpose in the wake of suffering by reviewing the background of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, and the research approach that was employed. This served to identify both the gaps in current research and the need for an enriched understanding of the experiences of meaning and purpose during suffering in the lives of adult Iraqi refugees. The second chapter grounded the study in existing research by reviewing a diverse body of literature that has direct relevance to the experience of meaning-making and

purpose in the context of suffering. Chapter Three presented information about this study's design, research questions, participant selection, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter Three also addressed issues related to the ethics and trustworthiness of the study.

This chapter presents the findings that emerged by following procedures of phenomenological analysis, which requires the researcher to carefully and repeatedly read the transcripts while looking for themes and patterns that emerge both within and across interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Demographic information on study participants as a group and as individuals is included. This is followed by an articulation of themes that emerged from what participants shared of their personal experience around the eight research questions.

Participants

This section provides demographic information on the three adult Iraqi refugees who participated in this study.

Demographic Information

Three participants were randomly selected from a list of 18 potential participants who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation in this study. Prior to their participation in the interview, informed consent was obtained. All three participants were adult male Iraqi refugees. They all fled with their families from their country, Iraq, to Jordan during the years 2014 and 2016 seeking safety and refuge because of the war. All have completed group therapy at CVT and all signed an agreement to participate in the six-month follow-up assessment. The participants' age ranged from 44 to 62, with a median age of 50.6. They were a homogenous group in terms of their marital status, race/ethnicity, and religious affiliation. All participants are married, have children, and identify as Arab Iraqis. All of them indicated their religious affiliation as Muslim. Education level among the three participants varied; one participant holds

a master's degree in petroleum engineering, another completed middle school, and the third has a high school education. To maintain the anonymity of study participants, pseudonyms that participants chose are used throughout this chapter. To maintain anonymity of participants' children, the researcher chose pseudonyms whenever the child name appears. Table 1 provides a summary of general demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Al-Shaker	Bashar Mahmoud	Al-Nasr al-Abyad
Age	62	44	46
Marital status	Married	Married	Married
Children	4	2	6
Education level	Middle school	Master's degree	High school
Year of arrival to Jordan	2016	2014	2014
Religious affiliation	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim

Individual Participants

Al-Shaker. Al-Shaker (age 62) is married and has four children. He is from Basra in South Iraq and arrived in Jordan seeking refuge in 2016. He served in the Iraqi military for three years beginning at age 18. Following his military service, he worked as a sailor for three years (1978–1980) for a public fishing company. In early 1980 when the Iraq-Iran war started, the government asked him and other former military members to return to military service. He was assigned to work as a technician at the military communication base. Forty days before the end of the Iraq-Iran war in 1989, while he was repairing wires, Al-Shaker injured his head, left eye, and left arm and had to undergo intensive care and treatment for over eight months. He was discharged from the army in 1989. Since 2003, he had witnessed militia violence, killings, and chaos, which accelerated in 2006 after Shiite shrines were bombed and more Sunnis were targeted and killed. As a Sunni, Al-Shaker was under threat, and a number of his relatives were

killed; his cousin and his cousin's son were among those who lost their lives. One night, a sound bomb hit the roof of the building where he lived. Al-Shaker described the fallout:

We couldn't file complaints; whom would we complain against? We didn't know who bombed us then, and if we went to the police station to complain, half of the police force are militia officers—where would we go? People were killing each other in the streets for no reason.

Al-Shaker had no choice except to leave everything behind and to move with his family to Salah al-Din in North Baghdad seeking safety. He moved first to the Al-Zubair district in Basra and stayed with his in-laws for four days, then left early one morning while it was still dark to travel to northern Baghdad to Salah al-Din. Al-Shaker mentioned that there were terrorists attacking the army and the police and the American forces, and there was chaos. . . . Don't forget that they would kill whoever participated in the Iranian war. I was afraid. If they asked about my injury and knew my age, they would know that I was involved in the Iranian war and they would kill me. . . . My wife and kids did witness killing, and it was difficult; when a child witnesses such things he will suffer psychologically, or might learn it and become violent. We saw lots of things, but thank God, we overcame them. I had to clam down my wife and my kids; it was hard to see them in continuous fear and anxiety.

Al-Shaker lived in Baiji County in Salah al-Din for eight years until 2014. At times, he had to make difficult decisions when his wife wanted to go and visit her family in Basra and he had to keep his young children with him and have her take only one child, Taher. He elaborated by saying, "She would take Taher with her. They wouldn't harm them because his name, Taher, is a Shi'a name, but they would kill or kidnap my other sons."

Until ISIS entered his area through Mosul in northern Iraq, the government's air force was conducting fire strikes on ISIS stations, and ISIS members were taking control over citizens. During that time, Al-Shaker's child Taher was sick and had to visit the hospital regularly to get blood, and ISIS occupied hospitals in his area. Al-Shaker managed to leave Baiji with his family and travel to Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq. He was willing to face great danger on his way to save his child's life. Al-Shaker gained the sympathy of the guards at the checkpoints by showing them Taher's medical reports, which helped him to get approval to pass. In Sulaymaniyah with his family, he stayed for a year and eight months in a hotel. It was not safe for Al-Shaker to send his children to school, which caused him frustration. He stated:

My children were excellent students, and now they stayed for almost two years out of school, so my wife said, "the best thing would be is to move to Jordan." It's an Arab country, speaking the same language, where we could settle in and send our kids to school.

Al-Shaker and two of his children obtained visas to enter Jordan, but his wife's and other two children's visas were delayed. In 2015, he had to leave his wife and two of his children behind and to move with two of his children, including Taher the one who was sick, to Jordan before their visas expired. There, they waited for the rest of his family to join them. This period was difficult for Al-Shaker; he waited for two months for his wife and other children to join him. He struggled financially, and his wife's visa was rejected four times. He described the situation:

So I went back to Sulaymaniyah and stayed there for six or seven months. My friend in Amman called me to tell me that he would apply for a visa for me and it would be issued within one week. I had no money, so I called my brother and he said that he would help

me with some money. This time the visa decision was reversed, meaning that my wife and two kids got accepted and I and my other two kids were rejected.

At that time, Al-Shaker's wife and children had to leave for Jordan alone. Two months after their arrival in Jordan, Al-Shaker family was reunited, and they have been living in Jordan for about three years waiting for UNHCR to resettle them in another country. He described his life in Jordan as safe, but he suffers financially because of a lack of resources.

Bashar Mahmoud. Bashar Mahmoud (age 44) is married and has two young daughters. He is from the center of Baghdad, Iraq and is a Sunni Muslim. He arrived in Jordan seeking refuge in 2014. He holds a master's degree in petroleum engineering. He worked at the Ministry of Oil, and from 2012 to 2014 worked as a field manager, which is a position of elevated status. He elaborated:

I was responsible for 17 oil wells; my job was that I was responsible for the oil wells from the point of oil extraction to the stage of pumping the oil into the pipes of the oil terminal in the port for exporting. There was an awards ceremony for highly sensitive positions and leadership positions in the ministries. Two thirds of the candidates were Shi'a percentage and one third were Sunni, and I was chosen from the one third for a high position.

A Sunni, Bashar Mahmoud was asked by the Ministry of Petroleum to work in another place among mostly Shi'as. At that time, he could not understand why he was moved to that area, but later he discovered that the Ministry wanted someone with no political background for this position to end the corruption, money laundering, and theft that was happening in the ministries in Iraq. He elaborated and said:

I am a man of science. I presented a study to the Minister [of Oil] at the end of 2013

about a project to invest the fumes that burn in the air when extracting the oil from the well so we wouldn't have to import the gas and wouldn't need foreign companies to do so. When I presented this study, everything changed for the worse. I felt that there was a war against me for about two months after I presented my study. I had a lot of authority on bids and referrals, which would reach up to 1 to 1.5 million dollars. I was harassed all that time; they wanted to pressure me into choosing the projects that they wanted, and they wanted me to reveal the prices to the competitors. I used to resist.

Bashar Mahmoud faced pressure from the controlling religious parties in the area where he worked when in early 2014, near the end of the presidential and the parliament period, he was asked to finance the election campaigns and refused. They continued insisting that he provide them financial support and asked him to provide them fake bids. He was pressured to sign a paper agreeing that they did the work and paid the money for the fabricated bids so that if they were caught he would be held responsible for the corruption. As he reflected on this, he said:

I can't change the details of the information of the streets or the buildings unless I get approval from a certain person; who would protect me if I did so? So I started to refuse what they were asking me to do, until the day of July 14, 2014, when I was returning from my leave from Baghdad going back to the dorms, the camp of employees where I used to live.

When Bashar Mahmoud entered his suite, he noticed that the furniture was scattered, some of it broken, his desk was turned upside down, and a piece of paper with a bullet taped to it hung on the wall with a message threatening to kill him and his family. Bashar Mahmoud brought his claim to the general manager of the oil projects and formed a committee for investigation. He recounted the committee meeting from July 20, 2014, in detail:

The four committee members were from the same religion—they were Shi'a—and until the day I ran away to Amman, they did not meet for any session to investigate what happened, although I had a strong personal relationship with the head of the committee, but he was pressured by the armed militias. He told me that if he investigated my incident and judged in my favor, they would kill his family. He told me that he chose to be silent and do nothing about it, that he cannot help me.

Bashar Mahmoud kept receiving threats and calls until September 1, 2014, at 2:30 p.m., when on his way from Nasiriyah where he worked back to his home in Baghdad, the government car flipped when it was attacked, and two of the guards assigned to him for protection and the driver were killed. Bashar Mahmoud suffered fractures and contusions that required a two-night hospital stay. He reported the incident to the Minister, who told him that the incident might be personal and he could not help. He was informed that he crossed a line when he suggested they stop importing gas from Iran in his proposal. During his interview, Bashar Mahmoud declared:

I am an Iraqi who lived for 44 years in Iraq, and all my loyalty is for Iraq only, and I found that the study would save money for my country. He told me that I didn't understand the way things work in this country. So I understood that I've become a lost cause for them and that my role was over. I left his office, I went to the general inspector, and I filed a complaint, and I provided him with names of contractors and companies, but I couldn't be sure of who was shooting at us.

After this incident, Bashar Mahmoud took leave from work and stayed home. On September 4 and 5, he received additional threats and found an empty envelope outside his door with bullet inside. On the third of December 2014, the school bus brought Bashar Mahmoud's little daughters home, and his younger daughter stepped out of the bus first. A black pickup

truck came toward his daughter, and men from the truck kidnapped her. Her sister, who is eight months older, stayed in the bus and she witnessed what happened to her sister. The bus driver came out to rescue the child, but he was beaten and fell to the ground. Through tears, Bashar Mahmoud said:

They took my daughter. She was six years old. I heard the screaming from inside the villa so I went outside to see what was going on. I found only one of my daughters. Half an hour later, they called me they said that they have my daughter and they want me to do things for them or else I won't see my daughter again. I asked them who they were, but they hung up. I immediately called the inspector, and I told him what happened. He told me that he was being pressured and he could not help me. He told me to help myself, and he told me that I have the men assigned from the protection department. I told him that I didn't have the protection men because I was on leave.

Since 1974, Bashar Mahmoud had lived in an area where the vast majority of citizens were Christians until 2003 when the Shiites took over the area. A man who had been his neighbor for more than 30 years was a tribal leader (Sheikh) from the Shi'a and had connections with the armed militia. This man helped him find out who kidnapped his daughter and negotiated with the kidnappers to bring back his child. Bashar Mahmoud expected that the kidnappers would ask for a ransom, but he was shocked to find out when they called a second that they wanted him to leave his country and go to Syria or Lebanon. They also demanded he hand over the documents related to his proposal to them and withdraw the complaint and not to attend the court sessions or he would not see his daughter again. Bashar Mahmoud had hope at that moment, and as he became emotionally distressed, he said:

I had the hope that I could negotiate with them, especially about withdrawing my complaint, because if I did my reputation in the Ministry would then be questioned. The third call was a video call, and it was a difficult call because [crying] they showed me how they raped my daughter. She was a little girl—she was only six years old—to be sexually assaulted? It was very difficult for me [crying]. . . . At that time, I collapsed. I gave the phone to the Sheikh, and he told them that I will do what they want, but he told them that I could not withdraw the complaint and that I would leave Iraq, and by leaving Iraq I wouldn't be able to attend the sessions, and he told them that I wouldn't go to Lebanon or to Syria.

The Sheikh came to an agreement with the kidnappers and told them where the proposal documents were being kept. The Sheikh guaranteed them that Bashar Mahmoud would leave the country within 20 days, and if he did not, the Sheikh would hand over his dead body. The kidnappers then agreed to meet to deliver Bashar Mahmoud's daughter to him. He continued to say, "I got my daughter back; her school uniform was torn. She was bleeding from her eye, ear, and head. . . . When my wife saw my daughter, she collapsed." After that day, Bashar Mahmoud was not allowed to leave his in-laws' house where he had been staying except to apply for his visa or he would be killed. He was monitored until he left the country.

They were also allowed to bring the child a doctor. The little child was slapped many times on her face, the eyelid muscle of her left eye was damaged, causing it to droop, and she was bleeding from her eardrum. The doctor noticed signs of rape. Bashar Mahmoud explained, "The doctor sympathized with us. I haven't told anyone about what I saw in the video. I told the doctor to stop talking until we left Iraq."

The visa was issued within six days for Bashar Mahmoud and his daughters but not for his wife. He arrived in Jordan with his two daughters in middle of December 2014. A few days later, his wife got her visa and joined her family in Amman, Jordan. Bashar Mahmoud's priority was to treat his injured child first, and he said:

When the doctor saw my daughter she was surprised. She said that my daughter needed urgent surgery. She said that there was internal bleeding, and she might lose her eye. I agreed to the surgery; the surgery was not 100% successful, but she stopped the bleeding, and she lifted up the eyelid a bit. The retina was damaged. The doctor said that we should wait until she is 15 years old to do another surgery. Her behavior changed, she became violent with her sister, and she was eating a lot, wet the bed, and had nightmares, and if you touched her anywhere she would say it hurts. So her mother started taking her to doctors and psychologists. . . . Her doubts were increasing when she would have a fever or tonsil infection because we would give her a suppository, and she would get very irritated and she would try to jump out of the window, which made my wife more suspicious until the International Medical Corps told her that the child was raped.

Bashar Mahmoud and his wife faced various challenges of various types, including financial, but he and his wife worked hard until they were able to help their child achieve some normalcy and agree to go back to school and attend psychotherapy sessions. To this day, she refuses to go to school unless one of her parents accompanies her and stays with her during the day.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad. Al-Nasr al-Abyad (age 46), whose chose a pseudonym meaning “white eagle” to reflect his courage and love of life and freedom, is married and has six children. He is from Basra in the south of Iraq. He arrived in Jordan seeking refuge in 2014. He has a

high school education and worked as a taxi driver in Basra. Al-Nasr al-Abyad started telling his story by saying:

We lived a safe life before 2003, and all of a sudden we became enemies of one another where a brother hates his own brother. . . . I saw people getting killed in front of me . . . and that impacted me and made me lose trust in everyone. . . . My friends were my enemies.

In 2006, while working as a taxi driver in Al-Zubair in Basra, he was parking to pick up passengers when masked men came and surrounded the street, blocking it with their cars, and as they came closer, they started shooting people. He witnessed the killing of many people who were Sunni. Some of those killed were his friends, and he picked one man up to drive him to the hospital, but he died in his car. Al-Nasr al-Abyad reflected and said:

He was my friend, a close friend—to die for no reason! That made me hate life; it made me hate Iraq and hate the area I am in. I was psychologically disturbed; my thoughts were distracted, and I was expecting them to come after me.

In 2008, his car was stolen, and in 2009, an unknown person stabbed him in his back, shoulder, and waist. Three months after he was stabbed, the militia raided his house when his wife and his children were home alone. It became clear that the militia was searching for him.

One day in 2010, Al-Nasr al-Abyad was passing by the shop where his son Hamed worked, and a car exploded on the same street. His son had seen him passing by his work and searched for his father among the dead. This was Hamed's first time seeing dead bodies. Al-Nasr al-Abyad continued sadly, "He then found me, and he was crying and he said, 'Dad, you are alive!' Hamed changed after that. He stopped having his humorous personality; he was distracted most of the time; he lived in horror."

Al-Nasr al-Abyad was now certain that he was targeted and made the decision to leave his home and belongings behind. He left his area with his family and stayed in a farm that belonged to a friend until their visas were issued. He escaped to Syria in July 2010 and stayed there for two and a half years with his wife and children. By this time, the war had started in Syria and was accelerating. One day soon after they arrived, his son left to buy bread when two groups of people started shooting at each other. His son was hit by approximately 30 pieces of shrapnel in his back and five in his head. Not all pieces were able to be removed, and pieces remain in him to this day. Al-Nasr al-Abyad described his feelings:

I felt ashamed. I was supposed to move my family to a safe place, but how would I have known? Yes, they were young, but I felt that I couldn't provide them with safety. The bombing was above the house we lived in. I didn't know that there were people opposing the ruling regime living on the same street. The rocket passed by me when I was standing by the window, and I was thrown across the room by the shockwave.

After the events escalated in Syria, Al-Nasr al-Abyad had no choice but to return to Iraq. He had no money and had to leave everything behind. He took a bus from the Syrian border to Iraq and contacted some relatives who lived in Takreet-Salah al-Din, close to Bagdad, who rented him a house. He stayed with his family there from 2012 until 2014. Then ISIS entered Mousel in June 2014, and just three days later they entered Takreet. At that time, Al-Nasr al-Abyad and his family went back to Basra, preferring to die there near their home. He elaborated, "I said to myself that if I were to be killed in Basra, at least there would be people who would go to my funeral. So I went back to Basra."

His family helped him by renting him a house, as he had no money to live on. He worked in Basra for a month as a guard, but then the raids began happening again, and he

became aware that the militia was looking for him but could not find him. He has never returned to his home since he learned that he was being targeted. He asked his wife and children to find another place to stay. The militia was looking for him in his father's home and took his father and his brother in 2014. To this day, he knows nothing about what happened to them. Al-Nasr al-Abyad felt numb as he remembered all the difficult moments, saying, "I don't know if they are detained; I don't know if they are dead or alive. My family searched for them, but they didn't find anything and no one gave any information about them."

Following the disappearance of his father and brother, Al-Nasr al-Abyad decided to flee to Jordan and to leave his family and children in Iraq until they got their visas. He stayed in Jordan from September 8, 2014, until February 16, 2015, but something happened that forced him to go back to Iraq: his son Abed, who was 15 years old at the time, was kidnapped. Immediately, he returned to Iraq.

I was terrified. I kept thinking that they killed him and they buried him. His kidnappers wanted ransom—first they asked for \$40,000! How would I manage such an amount? We negotiated until we reached the amount of \$7,000, and you have no idea how I managed to come up with the money. I begged people for it, and I felt humiliated. So I gave the money to the mediator, and they released my son at night. . . . I felt alive again, I didn't care about the money or the debt, and I didn't care about anything. . . . I felt that he was reborn. I felt great joy.

Then Al-Nasr al-Abyad decided to take his family back to Jordan. Two of his sons stayed and joined the rest of their family two months later when they received their visas. Finally, the whole family was reunited in Jordan in November 2015. Al-Nasr al-Abyad continued to describe his life in Jordan and mentioned that his son was kidnapped, arrested by

the police, and imprisoned because he was working illegally. He was later released under the condition that he would not work again.

During the holy month of Ramadan in 2017, Al-Nasr al-Abyad's other son, Hamed, was working in a café when four people attacked and stabbed him in the back. Although he initially made a complaint against the attackers, he had to withdraw it because he received threats of bodily harm. Not until a year and a half after their arrival did the family start to receive monthly stipends from UNHCR, which he described as minimal amount that would cover only the rent and electricity bills. Each one of his family members has been affected. He stated,

This incident is nothing in comparison to what we lived through, each member of my family was harmed. One of kids was psychologically traumatized, and he was diagnosed with rheumatism. He was supposed to be treated by taking an injection for 20 years. . . .

If anyone asked him anything, he'd start shivering and his eyes would start to tear. I am very careful in dealing with him.

Summary

This section provided information about this study's research participants and an overview of their survival journey to give readers a clearer understanding of the research findings. The following section presents themes that emerged from interaction with the data obtained through the in-depth interviews with the participants. Chapter Three discussed the trustworthiness of these findings and the methods used for data collection (Creswell, 2007).

Findings

The purpose of this research was to understand how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning-making and purpose in life in the midst of their suffering. In order to learn about this experience, eight research questions were developed to enable a better understanding of the

participants' experiences. These questions were answered by the research participants through their participation in semistructured interviews and by the researcher's review of the data and emerging themes with each participant at the end of the interviews. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. Please share as much as you feel comfortable with about your experience as an Iraqi refugee during the 2003 Iraq War.
2. How did you feel and cope at that time?
3. What kept you going?
4. How did you manage to survive?
5. What feelings do you have now when you think about your past experience?
6. What, if anything, positive emerged from your experience with suffering?
7. How, if at all, do you experience meaning and hope in the wake of your suffering?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

The research questions were structured to help participants gradually provide narrative on their experience of pain and suffering. This led participants to become aware of their coping strategies and to reflect on their experience of meaning and purpose in their suffering. The first research question enabled participants to share about their war trauma in Iraq since 2003. They were able to express their emotions and think of ways they coped so they could be prepared to answer the second question. Participants were able to share what kept them going while they experienced threatening situations when they were asked the third question, and they continued their narrative on how they managed and survived when they were asked question four.

Question five allowed them to express their emotions during the interview as they remembered difficult parts of their story. A shift in the participants' emotions was observed when they were

asked question six, which allowed them to think of and share anything positive that emerged from their experience of suffering. Question six helped them share about their experience of meaning and purpose in life during their times of suffering. The last question gave them space to share anything they wished. They were assisted with developing a short message and concluding thoughts they wished to share with the world and those who suffer.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on presenting the primary themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' interaction with the eight research questions. According to Moustakas (1994), researchers using a phenomenological design perform a systematic data analysis of significant statements and themes that are relevant to the phenomenon of investigation. The goal of this process is to generate a structural description of the common themes among participants' narratives to grasp the essence of the phenomenon being investigated.

According to van Manen (1994), qualitative themes should make sense of and capture the essence of participants' experiences and communicate a vital context for these experiences. The themes that emerged are supported by the three participants' narratives. Subthemes were developed around notable constructs within major themes and were supported by a minimum of two participants' narratives. Themes and subthemes are organized around each research question. Themes are presented in a narrative manner and are supported with direct quotes from participants' data in order to provide context and texture (Creswell, 2007). Wherever some of the themes and subthemes emerge in more than one question, they are linked with the research question that better reflects them.

Research Question One: Findings (Themes) Related to the Participants' War Experience

The first research question was presented as follows: Please share as much as you feel comfortable with about your experience as an Iraqi refugee during the 2003 Iraq War. Three primary themes emerged and will be explored in the section that follows.

Primary theme one: Sectarianism and insecurity. The first primary theme that emerged from the data was the experience of violence and cruelty due to sectarianism. This theme relates to what all three participants shared about their feelings of being disappointed over this devastating change in their society. They all described their life as peaceful before 2003 and stated that the level of violent conflict between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'as grew afterward. This change was shocking for them. Al-Nasr al-Abyad described his experience by saying:

It was a big shock not just to me, but to the whole population; no one expected that to happen—the bombing of Iraq, the explosions, the war, and the people who got killed, it was a big trauma. We lived a safe life before 2003, and all of a sudden we became enemies of one another where a brother hates his own brother. . . . I found out that my friends were my enemies—when you sit with someone before the events and you are friends, but after the events they flip on you just because of your religious doctrine. My friends were both Sunni and Shi'a, and after the events the Shi'a turned against the Sunni . . . after the events, if I wanted to ask a Shi'a person why they changed, the answer would be “because you are Sunni, you are impure. I can't be with you,” and I would be surprised by these words.

The theme of the experience of violent sectarianism was also observed as Al-Shaker shared his experience. In 2003, the militia began killing Sunnis, and it was no longer possible to feel safe after that. Sunnis were targeted in his area, Al-Basra; militia members were killing

people according to their names on their identification cards. His cousin and his cousin's son were killed, and Al-Shaker himself was targeted as a Sunni. A bomb was thrown over the roof of the building where he lived. With a frustrated tone, Al-Shaker stated:

We couldn't file complaints—who would we complain against? We didn't see the person who bombed us and we didn't know them, and if we went to the station to complain, half of the police force are militia officers. Where would we go?

By this, he meant that there was no authority that could provide him protection.

Feelings of insecurity and lack of protection were not merely due to the violent acts and discrimination but to the lack of security officials' support. Such situations created confusion and a lack of trust in people and official figures. Bashar Mahmoud mentioned that he became suspicious when the Ministry of Petroleum reassigned him to work in an area that was primarily Shi'a.

Things were unclear to me; I was a Sunni from the center of Baghdad. I was surprised that they chose me to go to that place that is mostly Shi'a! There were many questions, but I couldn't talk to anyone about it.

Bashar Mahmoud wanted to protect his daughters from learning the sectarianism that was beginning to involve even students at schools. He said, "I am a Sunni Muslim, but I preferred that my daughters go to a church school so they wouldn't learn about the sectarianism practiced in schools in Iraq." It was upsetting for him to become skeptical of his Shiite neighbor of more than 30 years when he could not seek the police for help. However, he had no choice except to ask this neighbor for help when the Shi'a militia kidnapped his daughter. He stated:

After 2003, the police force stopped being professional. I lived in a Shi'a area, and I had lived there since 1974. Before 2003, 90% of the residents were Christians, but after 2003

the Shi'a took it over. My neighbor of more than 30 years is a tribal Sheikh from the Shi'a, and he has connections with the armed militia. I went to him and told him what happened, and he told me to inform him if they called again and that he would talk to them. I stayed in his house for about an hour, then he told me that he found out who took my daughter.

Overall, the three participants shared different experiences with violent acts, but all shared how upset they felt over the sectarian violence that caused them to feel confused, insecure, and unprotected. In the midst of their violent environment, they and their families were faced with life-threatening danger. The following theme describes the participants' response to that danger.

Primary theme two: Role of responsibility in decision-making and survival. The second primary theme that emerged is the participants' deep sense of responsibility as fathers and the head of their households to protect their families. All the participants have gone through a series of emergency situations where they had to make immediate decisions, take risks, and sacrifice to rescue their families. They all refused to remain living under cruelty, violence, and injustice. Leadership and decision-making were characteristics that distinguished the men. Such traits, along with their wisdom, enabled them to lead their families to safety. During their journey of survival, they were not free of conflicting inner feelings of fear, anxiety, shame, and guilt. They also had to move from place to place and leave everything behind until they finally got settled with their families in the refuge country.

Al-Shaker had to leave his area, Al-Basra, when he faced unavoidable danger. When he became sure that he was being targeted, the first place he went was Al-Zubair. He stayed there at

his in-laws' home for four days until he managed to move to Salah al-Din. He experienced stress when he had to make a decision when his wife refused to go with him to Salah al-Din:

As you know I have a family. My wife refused to move to Salah al-Din, then I told her that she could stay with her parents and that I would take the kids and go, because I knew what was going to happen. . . . She said that she wanted to stay with her parents. I felt that there would be problems if I left with my kids, and without my wife, things would get more difficult. . . . Her brother gave her the choice of either going with me or staying, and he told her that he would drive me and the three kids to Salah al-Din. . . . They were very young. I am experienced with war-related things, so I knew what would happen. I did research about Iraq and what would happen to it, and at the last minute my wife agreed to come with us.

Although he was aware of the danger that he might face with his family on his way to Salah al-Din (for example, the militia could ask for money or detain people), he remained determined to leave. He stated, "I left at 3 a.m.; it was dark. Her brother was driving; he said that he knew a route not on the main road and that he was going to drive us through it." During the invasion of ISIS in Salah al-Din, he experienced more difficulty and had to leave Salah al-Din, where he had stayed for eight years. He faced danger on his way and decided to leave his area and go north to save his child, who needed continual visits to the hospital to receive blood transfusions.

My son needed blood, and he is a child, and there were no hospitals nearby because ISIS occupied the hospitals, and I was afraid of them. . . . I managed to get a car, and I took my family to the north of Iraq. Not anybody can enter that area, but I had my son's medical reports and the report that he was in need of hospital visits. They sympathized

with me, so we got in. We went to Sulaymania in the north of Iraq. We stayed in a hotel because we didn't know the area. I stayed in the hotel for one year and eight months. Difficult decisions were made multiple times in multiple situations. Al-Shaker worried over his children's future, safety, and education:

My children cannot go to school because Arabs, Christians, Sabe'a, and people from all religious backgrounds were moving to the north of Iraq. ISIS is a terrorist organization—it doesn't know the difference between people. They harm everybody; they take their money.

As a father, he felt responsible for his children's future, which led him to take additional steps and leave Iraq and move to Jordan.

Bashar Mahmoud was continually threatened. Three times, he received bullets in an envelope as a death threat. Additionally, he faced militia attacks and shootings while he was on his way from his job in the government car back to his home. Bashar Mahmoud decided not to give up and to make decisions to protect himself and his family. He described the situation the first time he received a death threat:

I took the paper—my direct reference was the general manager of the oil projects, and he is in direct contact with the Minister—so I called the general manager, and I told him about my problem. . . . The general manager formed an investigation committee. . . .

Until the day I ran away to Amman, they did not make any attempt to investigate what happened, even though I had a strong personal relationship with the head of the committee, but he was pressured by the armed militias. He told me that if he investigated my incident and judged in my favor they would kill his family; he told me that he chose to be silent and do nothing about it, that he could not help me.

About two months later, he was attacked and shot at on his way home from work. He said that after he was discharged from the hospital, he went to Baghdad. I met with the Minister, and he told me that the incident might be personal and they could not interfere. I told him that there was an investigation committee and that this was not the first threat I received.

Bashar Mahmoud's determination to remove himself and his family from danger led him to take further steps even as officials did not respond to his claims. He said:

I left his office, and I went to the general inspector and filed a complaint. I provided him with names of contractors and companies, but I couldn't be sure of who was shooting at us. I refused to go back to work, so I took an open leave and stayed home, and on September 4 and 5, in the mornings I found an empty envelope outside my house with a bullet in it.

Bashar Mahmoud refused to be treated unjustly and could not accept the fact that those who were in authority could not intervene and help. Shortly after he found the envelopes with bullets, he had to face the most devastating, heartbreaking trauma of his life when his six-year-old daughter was kidnapped and raped. He has already lost trust in the power of the police and the government's authority and professionalism. Although he was suspicious of and mistrusted his Shi'a neighbor, he approached him and asked for his help. His neighbor was a Shi'a Sheikh who could have influence with the Shi'a militia who had kidnapped his daughter. He said, I went to him and told him what happened. He told me to inform him if they called again and that he would talk to them. I stayed in his house for about an hour, and then he told me that he found out who took my daughter.

When negotiations with the kidnappers began, Bashar Mahmoud had difficult decisions to make. He wanted to save his child, but he also wanted to keep his good reputation. He was asked by the militia to withdraw his complaint and quickly leave Iraq for either Syria or Lebanon. The third call he received was a video call showing his daughter being raped by the militia. He collapsed and handed the phone to his neighbor:

He told them that I will do what they want, but he told them that I could not withdraw the complaint. He said that I would leave Iraq, and by leaving Iraq I wouldn't be able to attend the [court] sessions. He also told them that I wouldn't go to Lebanon or to Syria.

He negotiated with the kidnappers until they returned his child. He had to take some careful steps and make decisions to ensure the safety of his whole family. He had to keep what he had been facing to himself and not share it even with his wife. He shared what he thought and felt at that moment, saying:

I started thinking of the people I care about, that I didn't want to lose them too. I called my wife and I told her to go to her father's house. She asked me why, and I told her that he invited us for lunch. She was surprised because I rarely go to my in-laws' house. She asked me if I was going to send her the car. I told her no and that we didn't have a driver anymore.

The decisions he made included submitting to the militia's demand that he not leave his home except once to apply for visas. He had to ask the doctor who treated his daughter to remain silent and not to share anything related to the rape of his daughter. He stated, "The doctor told us that she saw seminal fluid. . . I told her to stop talking until we left Iraq." He finally managed to leave Iraq and bring his family safely to Jordan.

Internal displacement and seeking refuge in two countries are part of Al-Nasr al-Abyad family's survival journey. He had to make the decision and to keep his family safe and to live on a farm in his area, Al-Basra, until he obtained visas to move to Syria.

I went to Syria. . . . I was supposed to move them to a safe place, but how would I have known? Yes, they were young, but I felt that I couldn't provide them with safety. After the events escalated in Syria, there was no choice for us but to go back to Iraq. We didn't have money; I left everything behind. There were busses that would take us from Sayeda Zainab to the borders.

Not too long after he settled in Takreet, Al-Nasr al-Abyad had to make another difficult decision to leave that area and go back to Basra, from which he fled from danger the first time. He stated,

I left Takreet three days before ISIS got in. I went back to Basra, and I said to myself that if I were to be killed in Basra, at least there would be people who would go to my funeral. So I went back to Basra.

Soon, the militia targeted him and he had to leave his home and go into hiding. He said, "They didn't find me. I went out of the house and I never came back, and I told my wife and kids to go somewhere else."

At that time, he had to save his life in order to bring his family to a safe place. He made the decision to leave for Jordan. He had to leave alone and have his wife and children follow him when they earned their visas. During his stay in Jordan, he had to make another decision to return to Basra to rescue his child who was kidnapped during his stay in Jordan. He finally managed to bring his family to Jordan, their refuge country.

Overall, those men have proved to be responsible fathers and wise leaders of their own families. They did their best during times of danger and stood for their families' safety. Had they not taken those risks and made those difficult decisions, perhaps their families would not have survived the cruelty and danger.

Subtheme one: Separation and reunion. As fathers, all of the participants had at times to make difficult decisions and separate from their families and children. They had to take part of their family in Jordan while the rest of the family waited in Iraq to get their visas. Al-Shaker had to leave Iraq for Jordan the first time with two of his children while his wife and other children stayed behind. He had hopes of going back and bringing his wife and children back to Jordan together:

So I came to Jordan in 2015, me and my two kids, and we stayed at a friend's house for two months . . . We were waiting for my wife's visa, but it was rejected four times. My wife was staying at a hotel there with my other two kids, and I was here in Amman with two kids. We couldn't manage financially. So I had to go back to Sulaymania, not to the hot areas, to the north of Iraq, to the Kurdistan region.

He stayed in Sulaymania and planned to bring his family to Jordan. Things did not go as he wished, and the second time, it was his wife and other children who had to leave for Jordan and he who had to stay in Iraq with his other children.

So I went back to Sulaymania and stayed there for six or seven months. My friend in Amman called me to tell me that he would apply for a visa for me and it would be issued within one week. I had no money, so I called my brother and he said that he would help me with some money. This time, the visa acceptance was reversed, meaning that my wife and two kids got accepted and I and my other two kids were rejected. . . So I told

my wife to take the three kids and I would stay with Taher for a week and then follow them. My wife went to Amman; she stayed at my friend's house, and instead of a week it was two months. I got angry with the situation, and I told my friend that I wouldn't come to Jordan and to let my wife come back to Iraq because what he told me earlier was not true. And after two months my visa was issued. I came to Jordan and I met with my wife and we went to the UNHCR and registered as one family, and we have been settled in Jordan for three years now.

Although Bashar Mahmoud's experience of separation and reunion with his family was different than Al-Shaker's, he also experienced difficult emotions as he fled Iraq with his two daughters and left his wife behind.

The visa was issued within six days, but there was a problem: we all got our visas approved except for my wife. Her visa was rejected. Kidnappers called the agency and they told them that my wife had to travel. A few days later my wife got her visa and she followed us. We reached Amman.

Al Nasr al-Abyad had to leave his family in Iraq and come alone to Jordan and wait there for his wife and children. After few months, he had to return to Iraq to rescue his kidnapped child. He then left Iraq for Jordan for the second time. This time, he left with his wife and children while two of his children stayed in Iraq and followed them two months later when they earned their visas.

I came to Jordan, and for five months my family was trying to apply for visas but were rejected. I went to register at the UNHCR, and I told them everything. They told me to bring my wife and kids. I stayed from September 8, 2014, until February 16, 2015, but something happened that forced me to go back to Iraq. . . . one of my kids was

kidnapped, and I immediately went back. After that I decided that we should leave together. I applied for visas for all of us, and the visas were issued except for two of my sons'. So I left without them, but they followed us after two months. October 21 was when I arrived with my wife and kids . . . and my two sons followed us in November 2015.

All the men interviewed experienced times of separation from their families. They have gone through frustration and anger but were always persistent and always hoped to reunite as a family and settle in Jordan.

Primary theme three: Safety yet continued responsibility and suffering. Although participants and their families survived and settled in a safe country, they began another journey of suffering in their new home. They have constantly attempted to help themselves and their family members recover from their trauma. Lack of financial resources along with their deeply felt senses of responsibility, guilt, and shame caused them to continually search for resources to live and to help their children recover and engage in school or even work.

Al-Shaker became emotional when he talked about his children. He felt stuck, helpless, and sad that he could not provide for his children as he wished to.

My children need things. My children told me that they want to stop going to school—how will we live? Shall I let them leave school and get jobs? It is difficult. We are not used to asking for money; it's difficult for us to do so. So now we lost my pension, and the UNHCR does not help us with money. Life has become difficult. When I was wounded I didn't cry; I was young with a future ahead of me, and I visited a lot of countries. Yes, I was upset, but I didn't cry; even when my health deteriorated, I didn't cry, even though I was in a lot of pain, and I heard the doctor talk about my condition and

I didn't cry. But now I cried because of my children and our financial situation and the challenges I am facing. . . . Yes, because we spent all the money we had, it's hard for me to ask my brother for money. I can't. When my son came home from school the other day . . . [crying] he told me that he wants to work after school. . . . He wants to, he needs money. This is the most difficult thing in my life. Of course it is hard not to be able to support my son. Don't forget that a teenager at his age might go down the wrong path if he had no money to spend, right? It is difficult. I feel short, but it is not my fault. I had a salary and we were living a good life. To me I don't feel that I am remiss, but my children might think I am; they couldn't understand or appreciate the circumstances. . . . My concern now is for my family, just like anyone, when you have a family you don't think about yourself; you keep thinking of your family and children because you are responsible for them.

That sense of responsibility to continue to support their children caused them to feel inadequate although they knew that they were doing their best. Their priority is to provide an education and keep their children in good health. Bashar Mahmoud's first priority upon arriving in Jordan was to find medical care for his child. He said, "I wanted to treat my daughter; her eye was badly damaged because of the slapping. It is true that I've been to Amman before but not for medical reasons, so I asked my neighbors and they recommended an ophthalmologist."

He faced constant challenges helping his daughter recover and become engaged in school.

The behavior of my daughter changed; she became violent with her sister, and she was eating a lot; she wets herself, wets the bed, and has nightmares, and if you touched her anywhere she would say it hurts. We were trying to get her back into her normal life.

Her older sister went to school, but she refused to—in her mind she thought that what happened to her was because she went to school. We kept going to IMC [International Medical Corps] for almost a year and a half. They could make her go to school but she wouldn't go alone. It was either I go with her and stay with her the whole time or her mother.

Various challenges continued in the refuge country, including bullying and legal challenges with work permits. Al-Nasr al-Abyad also faced challenges with his sons, who went to work to support their families.

[They] found jobs and worked, they arrested Hamed and Abed for working illegally and they put him in prison. . . . He was imprisoned for working illegally here in Jordan? . . . The Minister of Labor gave us the letter of his release on the condition that he would not work again. After a year and half, I started to receive the monthly cash assistance from the UNHCR, 255 Jordanian dinars. It was enough for the rent and the electricity bill, but the other expenses were difficult; we needed food. Hamed worked here and there—in a café, in a printing shop—and also some organizations helped us. During Ramadan last year, Hamed was working in a café when four people attacked and stabbed him in the back. We took him to the hospital, and the police were there and they arrested the attackers that same night.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad had difficulties in all areas: financial, psychological, medical, and social. He had to find resources for his whole family, as they had all been affected. He said, Each member of my family was harmed. One of kids was psychologically traumatized, and he was diagnosed with rheumatism. He was supposed to be treated by taking an

injection for 20 years. If anyone asked him anything, he'd start shivering and his eyes would start to tear. I am very careful in dealing with him.

The fathers and their families were thankful that they have survived and made it to Jordan. At the same time, they stayed committed to keeping their families safe and to helping them engage in the new community so that they can continue their lives. All participants went through difficult situations, and all have walked through a journey of suffering and survival. Listening to such stories naturally leads one to wonder how those participants coped during their times of suffering. The following themes will explore this experience.

Research Question Two: Findings (Themes) Related to Participants' Feelings and Coping During their Trauma Experience

The first question allowed participants to describe their trauma experiences. While they remembered painful events that they went through, they shared their thoughts and emotions. To help them focus on and express what they felt during that time, they were asked the second question: How did you feel and cope at that time? The first part of the question focused on the participants' feelings; then, they were asked to share about how they coped during such difficult experiences, including how they with the feelings they had described. The following are three themes emerged from this question.

Primary theme one: Guilt, hopelessness and other feelings. Guilt and self-blame were the responses of two of the participants when they felt helpless because they were unable to protect their families. At times, they asked questions as an attempt to find justification for what they have been through. When Bashar Mahmoud was asked how he felt during his past traumatic experience, he immediately mentioned guilt and hopelessness:

I felt guilt, hopelessness—I never hurt anyone and I never carried a weapon. I felt helpless. I started questioning myself—if I've been doing it wrong for the past 44 years. Every now and then I would have these thoughts of blaming myself, that it was my fault.

Al-Nasr Al-Abyad shared the same feelings of shame and hopelessness. He used the word “ashamed” to describe feelings of both guilt and self-blame.

I was ashamed. I was supposed to move them to a safe place, but how would I have known? Yes, they were young, but I felt that I couldn't provide them with safety. It was a disaster. I felt that life was over, that life had no taste anymore. I hated life; we wished to die. . . . Yes, I wished I could die and get it over with. Moving around and being targeted—what did we do to deserve all that? Because we are Sunni or because Saddam went down? Where did we do wrong? Why is everybody killing each other?

Al-Shaker expressed feelings of guilt when he was asked what he felt at the moment when he remembered his past experiences. Through tears, he said,

When my son came home from school the other day, . . . he told me that he wants to work after school . . . he wants to; he needs money. This is the most difficult thing in my life. He then tried to justify his feelings of guilt as he described his feelings of inadequacy due to his inability to provide for his children as he used to in the past: “It is not my fault . . . if they ask for something that I can't provide, I feel remiss. They would think that I am remiss, but it is not our fault; the circumstances made it like this.”

When feeling guilty in response to their incomprehensible situations, the participants attempted to justify themselves by asking questions. Bashar Mahmoud began questioning whether he had been “doing it wrong for the past 44 years.” Al-Nasr al-Abyad asked, “What did we do to deserve all that? . . . Where did we do wrong? Why is everybody killing each other?”

Al-Shaker lamented, "It is not my fault. . . if they ask for something that I can't provide, I feel remiss."

Al-Shaker also has shared that fear was his primary feeling during his trauma:

I was afraid because I participated in the Iranian war. If they asked about my injury or my age, they would know that I was involved in the Iranian war and they would kill me. . . . My wife and kids did witness killing and it was difficult; when a child witnesses such things he will suffer psychologically, or might learn it, or might become violent. We saw lots of things, but thank God, we overcame them.

Although guilt, shame, and hopelessness were the participants' their primary feelings, it is worth noting that when they were asked how they coped with such difficult situations and feelings, they all responded with hope.

Primary theme two: Overcoming hopelessness with hope. The theme of hope appeared when participants were asked the fourth question: How did they survive? Al-Shaker succeeded in bringing his whole family to a safe place in Salah al-Din. When Al-Shaker gave up and decided to take his children to Salah al-Din without his wife because she refused to go with them, he felt hopeless. At the last minute, his wife agreed to accompany them, which restored his hope. At times during their stay in Salah al-Din, his wife would go and to stay with her parents, and he had to care for his children in her absence. During those times, his hope that she would return helped him to cope:

I had to clam down my wife and kids. It was hard to see them in continual fear and anxiety, and while at times my wife wanted to return to Al-Zubair. Once, she went for 10 days to visit her family, but I told her to leave the kids with me. . . . I managed with difficulty. I had my little kids with me; it was difficult for me to take care of them,

waiting for my wife to come back. . . . I was sure she would come back, yes; I felt confident that her brother would bring her back. We lived a very difficult life; you can't imagine how we did.

Bashar Mahmoud described his loss of hope when he could no longer ask for help from fellow Sunnis and asked his Shi'a neighbor for assistance:

I had no choice but to go to this person. I knew about his connections with the armed militia, but I had hope that he would help me because we'd been neighbors for a long time—for 30 years we were good neighbors.

When Al-Nasr al-Abyad was asked how he coped in all his suffering, moving from one place to another, and with his self-described belief that whenever a door opened and he tried to face the danger the door closed, he replied:

I came up with a way; I came up with a way to get rid of all of that, to think of the future. I thought about events that I wished could come true. For example, I imagined that the UNHCR approved my resettlement and me and my wife and kids were on the plane, and I would then have hope. I would picture the images—that, for example, we reached a different country, and we settled in a big house, and my children went to school and I had a new home country where I felt safety and stability. I would picture these images to give me hope to overcome the thoughts of the horrifying events.

Overall, it is evident that the participants' hope has helped them to cope at times of suffering and to never give up on people or circumstances. The following subtheme supports theme two.

Subtheme one: When one door is closed another will open. The participants explained their hope by sharing specific examples and concluded both explicitly and implicitly that when one door is closed another door will be opened. This idea gave them hope and strength.

Although it was not easy for Bashar Mahmoud to seek help from a Shi'a neighbor, he expressed, "Yes, I had thoughts that he had a hand in it. We were close; he knew everything about me, but thank God that when a door closes another opens." As he shared his disappointment with his family's reaction to his child's rape, he said they told him,

"We won't have you visit us again." They stopped communicating with us; they cut us off from financial assistance. . . . Like I said, when a door closes, another opens. My mother is an educated woman; she holds a PhD in history, and she takes a pension salary. She pays for my daughter's treatment. She is the only one who stood by us.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad felt frustrated and described his perception that whenever a door was opened, it would then shut in his face. He explained, "Whenever a door opens it closes in my face, then why stay alive? I felt frustration and depression. There are days that I cry when I remember these things." He was then asked how he faced those closed doors and he responded he did so by "creating images." Those images show him the other door that will be opened when he faces a closed door. He continued to give examples of those images:

We reached a different country, and we settled in a big house, and my children went to school and I have a new home country where I felt safe and stability. I would imagine these images to give me hope to overcome the thoughts of the horrifying events.

It seems that hope has motivated the participants to overcome hopelessness and to strengthen themselves by believing that they need to be strong.

Primary theme three: They believed they needed to be strong. Participants believed that they needed to be strong if they wanted to save their families. They all felt that they were in a position that demanded they be strong. Al-Shaker believed that his experiences strengthened him and gave him patience. He explained:

First my patience and my experience of the Iranian-Iraqi war—it was eight years of war. Eight years on the front lines was not an easy thing, and my patience; I had to be patient, not to get weak in front of my wife and kids because if I got weak, we would all collapse.

Bashar Mahmoud shared Al-Shaker's thoughts. When he watched the rape of his child through a video call, he said: "I collapsed." However, he continued to say, "If I had completely collapsed, no one would have known how to deal with it. I didn't want someone from my family or my wife's family to act in a barbaric way where there would be blood." While Al-Shaker believes his experience is what helped him to be strong, Bashar Mahmoud considers his education to be a source of strength which enabled him to make the decision to not seek help from his tribe:

They thought it was my fault, that I didn't know how to act and that I didn't ask them for protection, that I acted on my own. As an educated man, I don't think that these tribal issues are valid in the 21st century; maybe I am mistaken.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad mentioned that images of what he hopes for his children's lives have helped him:

Yes, it made me become a bit stronger. . . . It helped me to move from one place to another. . . . We should all have hope to live. I am hanging on to life. If you live with hope, you become strong. When you have a goal you want to reach, you will try to be strong in order to achieve your goal. I had made up my mind to leave Iraq no matter what because Iraq is not a country of stability.

Overall, participants felt that the source of their newfound strength was their children. Their responses varied when they described another source of their strength: it was past experience for Al-Shaker, education for Bashar Mahmoud, and imagination for Al-Nasr al-Abyad. For all

participants, however, their children are what gave them the hope and strength to cope, and children are what kept them going.

Research Question Three: Findings (Themes) Related to What Kept Participants Going

Participants shared how they coped during times of suffering and stated it was their care for their families' well-being that gave them strength. The third question was asked to find out what helped participants stay motivated to keep going. It is not surprising learn that, again, it was the participants' families and children is the only thing that kept them going. One theme emerged from this question.

Primary theme: Family and children's safety. Thinking of their families' safety helped all participants not to give up but to continue seeking safety. Al-Shaker's past experience gave him power and patience. That power continues as he thinks of his children's safety and future.

I was a sailor, and sailors have a lot of energy and patience. I lived on a ship for seven months; I once stayed on a ship for 14 months. Storms and high waves don't scare me. Other staff members were afraid; they would wear life jackets, but I didn't wear one. We stayed in a hotel because we didn't know the area. I stayed in the hotel for one year and eight months. I talked to my wife about our children, that they could not go to school because Arabs, Christians, Sabe'a, and people from all religious backgrounds were moving to the north of Iraq. ISIS is a terrorist organization—it doesn't know the difference between people; they harm everybody, and they take their money. There were only two or three schools in the area. My children were excellent students, and then they were out of school for almost two years. So my wife said "the best thing would be is to move to Jordan"—it's an Arab country speaking the same language where we could settle in and send our kids to school.

It was also Bashar Mahmoud's concern for the safety of his family that kept him going.

When asked what kept him going, he cited his desire

to keep the others safe. I lost one . . . but I wanted to protect the rest of the family. I wanted to get my daughter back. . . . Yes, with the least damage, because to be honest, of course what happened was difficult for me, but it was better than losing her forever, and I had it in mind that to bring her back was better than losing her for good. Someone who could do this barbaric thing he could end her life easily.

What helped Al-Nasr al-Abyad to keep going was not just the images that he was holding on to but his desire to bring his family to a better and safer place.

My children, it's all for them, to search for safety for their sake. . . . I don't want them to go through the horrifying events that they went through when they were young. I want them to grow up surrounded by beautiful things; I want to keep them secure because I won't stay with them forever; I want to put them in a safe place where they won't be harassed like their mother and I were.

What kept the participants going in spite of hardship was the care they had for others, their love for their families, and the goal they all have set to rescue their families and to bring them to a safe place.

Research Question Four: Findings (Themes) Related to How Participants Managed to Survive

It is not surprising that theme of "children's safety" emerged from several questions. This theme, which revolves around "family safety," emerged through the fourth question: How did they manage to survive? The following theme appeared from this question.

Primary theme: Hope and family safety. As mentioned earlier, this theme was repeated in several of the research questions. Al-Shaker's previous experience helped him to become patient and to have hope:

I was able to survive my past experience in spite of imminent danger. What it [survival] means for me is hope. . . . I had to be patient and not become weak in front of my wife and kids . . . because if I got weak, we would all collapse.

By these statements, Al-Shaker expressed his belief that his family's safety depended on him staying patient and strong. The hope that he shares with Bashar Mahmoud made him able to survive. His short, quick response to the question of what helped him survive was "hope." He explained further:

I had hope that this neighbor would help me and he not fail me. . . . and what makes me strong is my love for my family. To be honest, I felt that it was my fault, like I got them into it and I should get them out of it with minimal losses. I have no other explanation for it.

Having a goal helps individuals survive, and for all participants, it was the goal of their families' safety that gave them the power to survive. Although while Al-Nasr al-Abyad was witnessing killings he hated life and wished to die, he stated that he now wants to live his life.

We should all have hope. I wanted to stay alive. . . . My life will be over and I will still want to live more because I want to secure my children's future. . . . My children are the most important thing, so if I died later on, I would want them to say that I made them feel comfortable and that I left them in a good place and pray that I'd rest in peace, not to curse me—a father who struggled through his life for the sake of his children. . . . One should leave a positive impact wherever he can, even with his friends, even if it was just

a simple word so they'd remember him after his death. I have a few words I keep repeating to my friends and they laugh every time I say it. That is what they will remember me by.

Overall, it was the participants' love for their families that gave them the hope to live their lives with purpose. Their ambition to bring their families into safety helped them to survive. However, their hope and love for their families did not keep them from experiencing difficult emotions.

Research Question Five: Findings (Themes) Related to Feelings Participants Have Now When Thinking About Past Experiences

The fifth question explored feelings associated with remembering the past. This question led participants to express various difficult emotions such as guilt, loss, bitterness, and frustration related to being treated unjustly and witnessing inhuman acts of violence and cruelty. They also experienced physical symptoms such as numbness, shortness of breath, and abdominal pain. Two primary themes emerged from this question of what the participants felt now when recalling past experiences. Themes are related to feelings experienced while participants remembered their experiences and recalled what they learned.

Primary theme one: Feelings of guilt, bitterness, injustice, and loss and a sense of being caught between the past and present. The emotions related to the past expressed by participants were varied. In general, the participants experienced feelings of injustice and viewed the world as unmerciful. At the same time, they were caught up in emotions stirred by their current suffering, mostly due to their financial situation. They shared feelings of worry and concern over their children's future. When Al-Shaker discussed his past experience, he pleaded for understanding: "You must be reasonable. You leave your hometown; you leave your house;

you leave your possessions. We are oppressed and it [the decision to leave] was not within our control . . . [it was] difficult." Through these statements, he expressed a feeling of injustice. He would accept unfairness and loss if he could provide for his children in the present and lead them toward a good future.

I don't feel sad for what I've missed or for what happened, but for my children, for their future. . . . I imagine that the world is a bad place of beasts; there is no mercy. . . . My children need things. My children told me that they want to stop going to school—how will we live? Shall I let them leave school and have jobs? It is difficult—I can't. When my son came home from school the other day, he told me that he wants to work after school. . . . He wants to; he needs money. This is the most difficult thing in my life.

Demonstrating the guilt and worry he felt, Al-Shaker continued,

Of course it is hard not to be able to support my son. Don't forget that a teenager at his age might go down the wrong path if he found no money to spend, right? It is difficult. . . . my concern now is for my family. Just like anyone, when you have a family, you don't think about yourself—you keep thinking of your family and children because you are responsible for them.

Bashar Mahmoud expressed his intense feelings of guilt and self-blame.

I feel that bitterness is in my heart, and I feel pain in my abdominal area. . . . It is not easy, the bitterness of injustice. I did not evaluate the situation correctly, not taking the threats seriously, acting recklessly. I was supposed to be more careful.

Comparing his life in the past with his current life, he said:

I tried to end my life more than once here in Amman. I felt helpless, and there was no support. Before, we lived in a 600-meter villa with three floors, and we had a monthly

income of 8,000 dollars. Then we came here with nothing, squeezed in a 75-meter flat, and we didn't have money to treat our daughter or to put her in private school for better treatment. Isn't that helplessness? And we spent all of the money we brought from Iraq. As Bashar Mahmoud thought of ways to move past his current situation, he talked about his hope to start a life free from destructive and senseless customs and traditions:

I now have one hope: to get resettlement, to leave this society with its stupid thoughts and begin a new life with my family and daughter. This is the hope that I think of before I go to sleep and when I wake up. I'm an educated man, and I refuse the customs and traditions of the tribal community that we live in, and I am also aware of other cultures, so I am living on the hope that things will change and I can be rid of this bad treatment and begin a new life.

When asked what he wanted to be rid of, Bashar Mahmoud's voice accelerated, and he became angry over the traditions and customs. He became an advocate, opposing injustice:

To disown my daughter and to feel ashamed of her for something she didn't do? She is a six-year-old child! Are these right customs? When they disowned me and told me that I didn't ask for their help and that I acted alone so I should continue my life alone, is this a right custom? . . . I didn't ask for their help because I didn't want to cause war or sectarian conflict or victims or killings. . . . No one knew how I was thinking. Weren't those wrong customs and traditions? Answer me. To have my father-in-law asking me to divorce his daughter because I couldn't offer her a good life anymore? Is that the right tradition? . . . To protect his daughter, he wanted to sacrifice other people? He is a father, and it's been four years since he asked about his daughter, and when she calls him he

hangs up! Are these the right customs and traditions? I just have this one hope left. . . . I want to start a new life with my family.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad felt thankful that his children are safe now. He stated, I thank God. When I think about the calamities that I went through, I thank God that I'm alive and my children are okay. . . . I say that now I am okay, and I feel safe even though our life is a bit difficult.

He also spoke of getting caught in the past and remembering horrible situations:

You reminded me of my friends who died; I saw their faces. I remembered their faces and how they looked after they passed away, and I remembered one friend who I was sitting with at night and the following day he was killed. I remembered my father and my brother; this is the fourth year [since they disappeared] and I still don't know anything about them. When I was talking to you and remembering them, I felt like my soul was about to leave my body. I felt heaviness in my chest. I feel like something is grabbing my throat—horrifying scenes. Sadness for the people I lost. They died for no reason—they didn't do anything wrong.

He also spoke of the horror he continues to relive:

I've been living that life ever since I was 16 years old. I saw a lot of killings in my life—the Gulf War; I saw dead Iraqi soldiers. I am used to these scenes; it is true that they are horrible scenes, but . . . I imagine myself dead, and the way that I die in my imagination is that I get killed. When I was in Syria, I used to go to a psychiatrist for therapy. He asked me once about what scares me, and I told him that if I'm walking near a car, I would imagine that this car will explode right next to me and it will cut me into pieces, and that is because I've witnessed a lot of explosions in my life. I kept on imagining that

every car I walk by is going to explode, even here in Jordan; I imagine that I will die this way. Yes, we saw a great deal of tragedies.

Remembering these horrible scenes caused him to remember and to re-experience emotions associated with those images. He confirmed that his current focus is providing for his family and figuring out how to protect them and create opportunities for them in the future.

As participants remembered their past experiences, they experienced emotional distress. Their voices stand against these inhuman acts of injustice that caused them sadness, guilt, and bitterness.

Primary theme two: Learned lessons and “growing wisdom.” As the participants remembered their past experiences, they became aware of the lessons they learned throughout their lives. Lessons of wisdom gave them insight and provided them with the knowledge that will help move forward. Al-Shaker recalled:

In 1967, the British people decided to leave Iraq and Basra. They were leaving by sea, and they were begging father to leave with them. I remember the events of 1967—my father did not think the right way; he didn’t think of us. They told my father that he would lose if he stayed. They loved my father; his English was very fluent, and they trusted him. When they asked him to leave with them and he refused, I felt that he made a big mistake. Had we left with them, we wouldn’t be here now. So I don’t want to repeat my father’s mistake. I don’t want to make mistakes that affect my children so they won’t blame me in the future.

By this, Al-Shaker meant that he wanted to do what is best for his children: to leave Iraq for the sake of their safety. For Bashar Mahmoud, it was wisdom that emerged from his suffering. The change in his beliefs brought him more insight:

I used to believe in a saying that says there is one life and there is one God and whatever God wrote as my destiny I shall go through, whether I am to die at 44 or at 90. But I realized that there is more to it than just that; a man is not only responsible for himself but there are other people's lives depending on him.

Bashar Mahmoud learned that he needed to act responsibly, and that meant knowing that whatever decision he made or the way he thinks will not only affect him but others as well, whether those decisions and beliefs were wrong or right.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad learned to use the frightening scenes of people being killed as a reminder that his life will come to an end one day. This insight has changed his perception of himself, as he now sees himself as a person who has influence. He now tries to think of ways to make people around him happy.

I saw a lot of killings in my life—the Gulf War; I saw dead Iraqi soldiers. I am used to these scenes; it is true that they are horrible scenes, but . . . they're a constant reminder of the moment I will part my loved ones. . . . One should leave a positive impact wherever he can, even with his friends, even if it was just a simple word, so they'd remember him after his death. I have a few words I keep repeating to my friends and they laugh every time I say it. That is what they will remember me by.

Remembering the past and its difficulties, though uncomfortable, was not futile for the participants. It helped them reflect on their experiences and draw the wisdom and insight that has changed their attitudes toward life. After they reflected on the positive lessons they learned through their suffering, they became ready to interact with question six.

Research Question Six: Findings (Themes) Related to Positive Effects of Experiences with Suffering?

The sixth research question explored participants' experience of anything positive that emerged from their suffering. Participants recounted unforgettable moments of near-death experiences and unexpected ways their families survived. They narrated stories and reflected on moments in which they felt they were loved and cared for.

Primary theme one: Unforgettable moments of divine protection. When participants were asked if there was anything positive that emerged from their suffering, they recalled situations that could not be explained in any other way but divine protection. They believed that God is in control. Al-Shaker recalled a situation when he was in Salah al-Din working in Baiji County for the municipality. His job was to observe the workers who cleaned the streets, and he was assigned a specific street to monitor. He told his story:

I had six workers to observe, and there were many American troops in Baiji, and there were also a lot of terrorists. I was to observe a certain street; my workers were responsible for cleaning the street and I was to observe them. There was a government building on that street, and it was supposed to become a base for the Americans. The terrorists didn't want that—to have Americans inside the city—so there was a challenge. A day earlier I had a disagreement with someone, and this person was from Baiji and I was considered a stranger. He kept crossing the line and he had no right to.

He continued,

By crossing the line, you insult me and my workers. He wanted to write down that we didn't come to work. . . . He then went to the manager; then the manager called me to come to him, and when I got there the manager suggested that we should solve the

problem. . . . The manager told me to move to another working area and that man would take my place—that was a day earlier. When he took my place, they reached the street at 7 a.m., and they got to the building to clean it, and a huge terrorist car loaded with big rocks and explosives parked near the building. The driver drove the car into the building, killing all my men. It was one night before I changed locations. So as you can see, it is up to God whether I live or to die. If what happened a day before didn't happen and I was not relocated, I would have been killed with them. Imagine a huge car loaded with explosives. The whole area was destroyed. I survived more than one dangerous situation. It's God's will, and it's what God wanted, so I had the hope and the conviction that it's all in God's hands.

While Al-Nasr al-Abyad was sharing about his past experience, he remembered a situation in the Al-Zubair area in Basra when he survived an explosion when he listened to "something" in his heart that told him to change direction:

In Al-Zubair in Basra, there was an explosion in the shop where my son . . . used to work. That day I was walking, and I passed by Hamed in the shop, and then something in my heart told me to change my direction to go another street, and when I got to the other street, a car exploded on the previous one. Hamed had never seen dead bodies before, that was in 2010, so Hamed was looking for me after the explosion, and that was when he saw the dead bodies, and he was searching for me. He then found me, and he was crying and he said, "Dad, you are alive!" I considered it a test. God was testing me, that after all the tragedies there will come a better time when I would be relieved. It is God's doing.

Bashar Mahmoud's experience of divine protection came in the form of help from an unexpected figure: his neighbor, a Shi'a Sheikh. He said, "I had thoughts that he had a hand in it—we were close. He knew everything about me, but thank God that when a door closes, another opens."

Primary theme two: Unforgettable moments of priceless gifts. Participants also felt thankful when sharing about meaningful moments when they received what they needed. They valued those moments, as they gave them insight and hope when they were in need of support. These moments made them feel loved and cared about.

As a man who used to provide for his family, Al-Shaker feels "weak" if he asks for help. As he put it,

I shared my burdens with the therapists at CVT, the burdens that I cannot share at home. I can't even share them with my friends because then I would feel weak. . . . I can't ask my brother to give me money; I'd feel weak and I can't do it.

Al-Shaker recalled a time when he was in need of money and was unexpectedly contacted by an old friend:

An old friend called me. I asked him, "Who gave you my phone number?" He told me who, and he asked me how I was living. I told him in God's care. I used to earn a salary that covered the rent and the electricity. He offered me money; I was thankful. I also have a sister who gives me money sometimes. . . . I get help just right when I need it. My son tells me when I receive a text message from my sister telling me about an organization that provides financial support So life does not stop; God helps us.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad has also been facing difficult financial circumstances. He recalled an incident that was meaningful for him when he had no money to buy bread for his family. He was enthusiastic when relaying this story:

God made it easy for me. It happened to me a while ago that I had no money. I paid the rent and the electricity bill and I had no money left, and I needed to buy bread, so I went out of the house depending on God's work. I found five dinars in the street!

As he laughed, he continued,

I took the money and I bought cigarettes and bread and tomatoes and a few other things. Before, I had been thinking that I would be embarrassed to ask the baker to give me bread without paying him. I was so happy, as if I found five million.

This experience gave him hope, and when he was asked to explain his good fortune, he articulated:

It is that I have something in life. There was a similar situation that happened in Syria to one of my friends. He was so poor, he didn't have money at all, and he was away from his house, and he wanted to go home but he had no money. He prayed to God for help, so he walked for a bit, and he found money in the street just like I did. . . . There is something waiting for me in the future. For sure I will be relieved; things are happening to me that make me feel that there is a better future coming. . . . I keep asking God for forgiveness . . . [I have] a strong belief that God is hiding something better for me, but it needs time.

Money was one of the most valuable and meaningful gifts the participants could have received during their time of need. However, the participants' comments revealed that humans do not simply need money to know they are loved and cared about. Money for bread is crucial to

survival, but “love” was the gift that Bashar Mahmoud described as “a candlelight in the dark.”

To explain what he meant, he shared:

This experience that I went through made me discover a side that I never knew existed in my wife. For 12 years of marriage, I thought that she was all about travelling and shopping and spending money and clothes, but I discovered that she is attached to family life; she stood by me even after I got sick, and she didn’t leave me. It was her commitment, although her family and her father were pressuring her to ask for a divorce and return to them. It gives me so much happiness; it’s like candlelight in a dark place. What I learned is that a person can’t tolerate all the pain alone; there were many things I kept from my wife, but when I saw that she was willing to work cleaning houses to provide us with money for rent and for treatment, I felt that someone was sharing my pain. She stood in the face of her father and brothers, and she refused to divorce me. This meant a great deal to me. Having someone love me for me, the good and the bad in me, gave me power to continue. Thank God.

His wife’s love for him as a man and not for his position or money made Bashar Mahmoud feel empowered and gave him the hope so he did not to give up on life. It is also that love that allowed him to trust his wife and share his burdens with her, knowing there was someone who would accept him and not judge him. He said, “It was a heavy burden was lifted off of my shoulders, that I was not the only one carrying that burden and someone was sharing it with me.” It was an invaluable gift for Bashar Mahmoud to receive acceptance and love and to discover that he is still loved in spite of the loss of his position and money. He likened it to a light in the darkness.

The gifts that the participants received when they had lost hope restored to them the strength to continue their lives. These gifts were the good things that emerged from the bad. Their discoveries of other meaningful aspects in life could not have been discovered except on the pathway of suffering. Through these experiences, they felt cared about and loved.

With such enlightenment, it became possible for the participants to still experience meaning and purpose in life. The following questions explore how they accomplish this in spite of their pain.

Research Question Seven: Findings (Themes) Related to How Participants Experience Meaning and Hope in the Wake of Suffering

Is it possible that something good can come out of experiences of violence and tragedy? How have the participants' perspectives on life changed? Asking the participants how they experience meaning and hope in the wake of their suffering allowed them to share what became more profound in their lives after surviving unbearable suffering. The cruel world they lived in has grown in them a passion to stop the influence of all inhuman acts on their families by bringing them to a safe environment. The participants began to value life itself and the experience of safety over material possessions. They wanted to rebuild their family's lives and to make difference and raise their children with good values. They see their true identity as men of good reputation and good morals and ethics. Their faith in God has also grown stronger. Following are the four primary themes that emerged on how those men experience meaning and purpose in their lives after trauma.

Primary theme one: Living in a safe environment and world. All three participants mentioned that their primary goal in life is to live with their families in a safe place. Throughout their interaction with the question of meaning and purpose in life, they described the world that

they lived in as a world of acts of inhumanity and injustice. They all described what it means for them to live in a safe environment. Al-Shaker shared that safety, to him, is

the goal of life! We got out of a place filled with problems and danger and violence and inhumanity in all meanings of the word, and we wanted to leave for another world, a calm, peaceful world where there is no violence. This is our goal in life: for our children to live in peace, to live with people who understand the meaning of life, to seek education and learning. If I had left them in Baiji with ISIS, they would have joined ISIS by now. They would take them and teach them violence and killing. Why would I stay? I should leave this camp of killing and inhumanity. Thankfully, we left there for a better place that has some drawbacks, but at least there is no violence and no killing. The children won't think of the negative things; they'll think of the positive. . . . The world that has humanity and respect and the world that respects a person's values, where they provide human rights—that is a different world. When I lived in Baiji and on my way to work I would see decapitated heads in the streets—what would happen to my children if they saw such a thing? . . . This is not life. . . . What kind of life would that be? . . . My goal was to remove my kids from these scenes, away from these areas the ugly areas . . . to a place where there is humanity and respect. Where the kids leave for school and return home safely. We live a simple life, but we are living in good surroundings; in Iraq, we wouldn't have that. We were asleep and our roof was bombed!

Al-Shaker's main goal was to save his family from a violent environment because he believed that humans were not meant to live in such conditions. He wanted them to see what life is truly about. Bashar Mahmoud described the safe environment as an environment that would restore his daughter's childhood and what has been stolen from her. He is looking for an environment

that respects the human right to education and the right to work. His reflections are valuable as he compared his life goal when he lived in Iraq with his life goal after his trauma:

Like I told you, if a person is to live without having a goal to achieve, then in my opinion he cannot live—you have to have a goal to achieve. In Iraq, my goal was to have a good job and a good monthly income, and I reached that. Now when the circumstances changed, my goal became to reach a safe environment to start a new life and to remove the negative impact of my daughter's trauma. I want to start a new life together and get rid of the tribal consequences and the barbaric traditions. That is what we want to do—to get to a safe environment where my daughter could be free of the impact of her trauma. . . . My message is to bring my daughter's childhood back, the childhood that she lost . . . to make a new imprint on her life that would make her forget the old imprint that happened to her because of me.

He proceeded to define a safe environment:

It is a place where you can have a good life to you and to your family; it is a place where there are no restrictions to having your children accepted in schools. . . . There is freedom in education with no pressure . . . a place that liberates me of these obligations and restrictions. I have a master's degree in petroleum engineering, and I want a place that at least could accept my credentials and provide me with a chance to use my degree, not a place that recognizes my certificate but does not allow me to have a work permit or a place that wants me to work illegally.

The experience of injustice and his love for his family caused Al-Nasr al-Abyad not to give up on his hope to bring his family to a safe place.

If I was single I wouldn't have cared, but now I am responsible for a family, wife, and children, and I have to stay alive for them. I have to struggle, and I have to take them to a safe place so they are comfortable. I have to keep on trying. I wanted to keep on trying to find this better place for them as long as I'm alive. I have to protect them from danger and injustice. There were places in Syria I could have settled, but I wasn't sure that danger and injustice wouldn't be there too.

When Al-Nasr al-Abyad discussed how he coped during suffering earlier in his interview, he described images of a better, safer life. He described his image of a better life compared to his life in an unjust world:

I don't want them to go through the horrifying things they went through when they were young. I want them to grow up surrounded by beautiful things. I want to make them safe because I won't stay with them forever. I want to put them in a safe place where they won't be harassed like their mother and I were. I wish I could take them to a place where there is freedom and democracy, and if someone comes to their door, I don't want them to be frightened. If someone needs anything from them, they should call them and tell them where to go. We didn't have this in Iraq; they'd come and knock at the door and take you away from your house, and they might even beat you.

Overall, all fathers felt responsible for their families' safety, and providing this safety seemed to give them meaning in life. According to the participants, safety is necessary to experiencing the meaning of life.

Primary theme two: Raising up a good generation. In addition to seeking an environment where principles of justice and freedom are practiced, the participants felt responsible to bring up their children with good manners and to practice good morals and ethics.

Al-Shaker believes morals and ethics provide meaning to life. Hence, a world with no values and ethics becomes a place “beasts” live. In his view, a world with no morals is a dangerous place. His deep sense of responsibility as a father led him to say:

Now I am a responsible person; I have a wife and I have kids. God gave me many things, but I am also responsible for them. I am responsible for raising my kids, to teach them right from wrong, to keep them away from danger. God gives life, but I am responsible for teaching my children the good values and manners that represent the continuance of life, and without them life won’t continue; we’d become beasts; there would be danger.

When asked to validate what was meant by his noble message, Al-Shaker stated that to teach his children good values and manners is a representation of the continuity of life. Bashar Mahmoud viewed himself as the pillar of his family. His love for his family has helped him to stay strong so that he can raise his children in an environment that reflects the values he wanted them to learn. His values and emphasis on good manners are reflected in his daughter’s good reputation:

I consider myself to be the pillar of the house; if I fall the whole house falls, so I have to get them to safety, and I don’t care what happens after that. I’m against the traditions and the customs, and I deny them because I was harmed by them, but there are parts of them that you can’t deny. You can’t treat a boy like you treat a girl; when you want to go and ask a girl to marry your son, you ask about her reputation and the reputation of her family, and even if the girl has a good reputation, if one of her parents does not, you won’t ask for her to marry your son. That would be impossible, as people who live in the Middle East have something inside of us which we cannot get rid of . . . and don’t tell me that I am wrong. You live in an Eastern society and you know you can have your son marry a poor girl or an uneducated girl, but it’s impossible for you to accept that your son

will marry a girl with a bad reputation because this wife-to-be is the one who is going to raise the children. She will give her children what she took from her parents.

Although Al-Nasr al-Abyad felt frustrated when he remembered all the cruelty and injustice he faced, his experiences made him become more passionate about his ethics and more determined to instill good values in his children.

There is no good upbringing in Iraq. I wanted to raise my children well . . . to be honest with people, not to lie and not to steal, to be committed and respectful to the elderly.

Respect is very important. . . . [I wanted] to teach them that, for example, if they were sitting with people and someone older is speaking they should not speak; they should be silent, and they should not interrupt.

When asked whether his life's purpose would be something other than raising his children well if he had not gone through suffering and what his experience has given him concerning his children, his response was:

If I lived a good comfortable life, I wouldn't be concerned about raising them well. You want to know why? . . . Because I would be comfortable with no worries. What happened to us made us disregard the unimportant things in life; it made us think more about our children, and it made us think about how we can raise them well . . . because if they were good, people will love them. My son is not married; if people know that he is a good man, a lot of people would want him as an in-law, but if he is a bad guy, who would want their daughter to marry him?

Life for the participants becomes more meaningful when they care about their children and train them to live with good manners that reflect their value of respecting humanity.

Ultimately, their children can be the ones who pass on what they have learned to the next generation.

Primary theme three: Good reputation and influence. All participants expressed that having a good reputation matters to them. It gives them a sense of purpose and meaning in life. All participants valued not only bringing their children to a safe environment and teaching them good values and manners, but also having a good reputation themselves. Reputation is their legacy and the inheritance they will leave for their children. The participants wanted their children to remember them and feel proud of them. They wanted to leave a positive, lasting legacy. Al-Shaker, thinking of his children's future and what he could leave for them, stated:

I want to put my children on the right path. I am 62 years old, and I don't know how much longer I'll stay alive, but it's important to put my kids on the right path so they can remember me later on. I want them to live a life of humanity, not the life of animals. There is nothing more than patience, respecting people's opinions, respecting others, and living peacefully with each other.

He further explained that because he is man of good reputation and is trustworthy, he earned his landlord's trust and respect, even in situations such as when he was unable to pay his rent on time. He stated, "What gives hope in life is trust in people and interacting with people and not lying to them. Why do you think that the landlord isn't asking me for money to pay for the rent?"

Similarly, Bashar Mahmoud reached the conclusion that "money comes and goes, but a good reputation and good principles stay." As mentioned previously, he views himself as the foundation of his home: "I consider myself to be the pillar of the house; if I fall, the whole house

falls.” Through his suffering, he came to more highly value the traits of integrity and honesty.

He came to realize that there is more to life than status and wealth.

I used to be a spender; I never cared about how much money I was spending. I could spend 5,000 dollars in one day, but now things have changed. Life has a sweet part and it also has a bitter part, so a person must always keep the bitter days in mind.

He described his personal golden rule:

The path of integrity and honesty is going to be a difficult path, but there is nothing that makes you prouder. Money goes away and so does health, but a good reputation stays. Reputation is better than wealth. I had a lot of money and it all went away, but if you go to the Ministry of Oil and ask about Bashar Mahmoud, everybody will tell you that he came in clean and he got out clean.

Bashar Mahmoud clearly values his good reputation and the heritage he passes on to his daughters. It is his reputation that gives him a true sense of identity and allows him to feel valued as an individual who can make difference. When he shared his disappointment over the traditions of his culture, he demonstrated that he appreciates the value of a good reputation that he can pass to his daughters:

I’m against the traditions and the customs . . . but there are parts of them that you can’t deny. . . . When you want to ask a girl to marry your son, you ask about her reputation and the reputation of her family, and even if the girl has a good reputation, if one of her parents does not, you won’t ask for her to marry your son. That would be impossible, as people who live in the Middle East have something inside of us which we cannot get rid of . . . and don’t tell me that I am wrong. You live in an Eastern society and you know

you can have your son marry a poor girl or an uneducated girl, but it's impossible for you to accept that your son will marry a girl with a bad reputation.

Similarly, Al-Nasr al-Abyad believes that a good reputation is evident through how people view his children: "It is enough for me that people would say that my children are good people with high morals." Further, to him, good reputation means that his children remember him as a good father who sacrificed for his family to reach a safe place. He emphasized the importance of leaving a legacy:

I want to leave a memory behind, not just for my children, but for the people who know me too. I want them to say that I sacrificed for them. . . . I took them from one place to another, that I tried to keep them safe, and that I tried to provide a good life for them.

He is also concerned with leaving his children with a good heritage for their future. He cares about his children's reputation: "My son is not married. If people know that he is a good man, a lot of people would want him as an in-law, but if he is a bad guy, who would want their daughter to marry him?"

Overall, the participants value their good reputations as fathers and the heritage they will impart to their children. They wanted the value of their reputations to last so their children would remember the goodness of their fathers and live out the same legacy and feel proud of their fathers.

Primary theme four: Respect of humans' freedom. Participants' past experiences and pain and suffering were related to a lack of respect for humans' freedom to choose. When they were targeted because they were Sunni, they felt disrespected. They opposed all acts that disrespect human's ability to act freely as long as their acts do not interfere with others' affairs. Al-Shaker highlighted the value of respecting the human right to choose one's religious

affiliation. He explained that people's ability to choose what they like does not give permission to others who are different than them to judge them:

In India, there are 360 religions. I went to India, and there are people who worship cows, and there are people who worship the sun, but they all live a respectable life. Respectable means not interfering with other people's affairs. Freedom of choice is very important. Not to tell a person if they are doing right or wrong—every person is free to do whatever they want; only God holds us accountable. You keep your religion, and I keep my religion, and we respect each other and we live safely. What more would you need? What more than this do humans need? . . . There are no problems in India; Iraq has many problems.

Bashar Mahmoud explained what it means to live in an environment that respects humans regardless of their color or religious background. He said that a “safe environment is where I am not ashamed because of my skin color or my religion; they treat me like they treat a Christian or a Jew, where there are no categories of religion.” He said in an environment like this, he feels “that I am a human.”

Bashar Mahmoud also provided examples of times when humans' freedom of choice is disregarded within the same religion. He felt disappointed and empowered at the same time to say:

I want to provide a life where people won't prevent my daughter from entering school if she is not wearing a hijab; this is something between her and God. This is where I want to live. I don't want to make my wife wear a hijab, which is a personal conviction, and it is personal freedom. If you sin, you will be held accountable for it, not me. Why do you think I got my daughters to go to a Christian school even though we are Muslims?

Because I knew that this school would not impose wrong traditions and customs and thoughts upon my daughters. My eldest daughter went to a Muslim school for only one month and she came and told me: ‘‘Dad, why don’t we wear black clothes and beat ourselves on the face on the 10th of Muharram?’’ She was only six! How would I make her understand? When she comes and tells me that they cancelled art and physical education sessions because it is Haram [forbidden according to their own understanding of Islamic teachings]! . . . So I had to take them out of that school and enroll them in a school of the Chaldean Church because there is no discrimination there and they won’t teach my daughters wrong traditions. [This is] where everybody has their own religion; this is the environment I want to live in . . . freedom of religion. Excuse me for saying this, but if I were to drink alcohol, I would only be hurting my health and myself, but my neighbor would not be harmed or hurt . . . I want the community to treat me like a person not like an animal.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad was targeted because he was a Sunni. He had Shi’a friends in the past, and he opposes the way sectarianism has caused people to treat one another unjustly:

Patience is the key to relief, and I would tell my friends to leave the place they experienced injustice in, to move to another place. Injustice made me move. . . . I would have stayed if I were satisfied. And that made me face more challenges. I went through battles in defense of my dignity; a person would do anything to defend his dignity and his family’s dignity. If I felt injustice, I would defend myself in every way I could, and if I couldn’t, I would leave that place.

The men advocated for valuing human freedom. They value the freedom of choice when it does not interfere with others’ affiliations. For them, meaning in life can be seen when humans are

treated as humans. When the participants' freedom is respected regardless of who they are and regardless of their religious orientation, their lives can be experienced as meaningful.

Research Question Eight: Findings (Themes) Related to Anything Else Desired to be Shared

The final question of the interview gave the participants the opportunity to develop concluding thoughts or a message that they wanted to share with the suffering world. Each one of them highlighted their core values. Those values represent their uniqueness and maturity.

Primary theme: Moral values matter the most in life. All participants agreed that moral values are what matters most in life. They have elevated morals over materialism. Those morals include justice, integrity, honesty, and patience. Through their words and the way they live out these morals, they advocate for the good of humanity. Al-Shaker highlighted the values he deemed most important. According to him, the values that should be maintained regardless of one's suffering include

integrity, patience, honesty, and faithfulness. With such values, there is no space for despair. God is the creator, and he is the source of wealth, and money is for a cause only. What is more important is human integrity and pride.

For Bashar Mahmoud, good and pure principles form a wealth that can be passed from generation to generation. He believes that money comes and goes, but good reputation lasts. At the end of his interview, he stated:

The path of integrity and honesty is going to be a difficult path, but there is nothing that makes you prouder. Money goes away and so does health, but a good reputation stays . . .
. I had a lot of money and it all went away, but if you go to the Ministry of Oil and ask about Bashar Mahmoud, everybody will tell you that he came in clean and he left clean.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad stands for human rights and justice. He preferred to reflect on the value he is most passionate about:

My message is not to the people; my message is for the governments. I want to tell the governments to take care of their people, pay attention to injustice, and [there have been] enough wars. People died for no reason; governments fight and the people die. I'd say to the government that they should solve their problems and keep the people out of it. I say this all because if the government—if the ruler—is unjust, the people will be divided, especially if the ruler favors one side of his people over the other. So I'd say justice and equality.

He continued,

My message for those who have suffered from injustice and inequality? I would tell them to be patient. Patience is the key to relief, and I would tell them to change the place they experienced injustice in, to move to another place.

Overall, as the participants gave their message to the world, they became a voice defending humanity and restoring the dignity that cruelty has damaged. For the participants, it is meaningless to live a life without morals. They all called humans to live from the morals of justice, integrity, honesty, and patience.

Summary

This chapter presented demographic information and findings from this phenomenological study of how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in the face of their suffering. An extended review on individual demographic and background information has been provided on the three participants in this study. The remainder of the chapter focused on defining and describing the primary themes and subthemes that emerged

from interactions with the participants around the eight research questions that this study explored. Drawing on the data that the participants provided through their interaction with the research questions facilitated the progression of findings over the following areas. First, participants have all experienced war trauma, suffered insecurity due to sectarian violence, faced feelings of responsibility, made decisions to help their families survive, were forced to separate from their families during their exile, and reunited with their families in their refuge country. Additionally, although they felt safe in Jordan, they have continued both to protect their families and to suffer. They felt hopeless and guilty during their time of trauma in Iraq, but hope and their belief that they had to be strong helped them to cope at that time. Their family and children kept them going. Hope and their dedication to their family's safety also helped them manage to survive. As they were telling their stories, they felt guilt, bitterness, injustice, and loss on one hand, but they also shed light on the lessons they learned that gave them wisdom. They shared moments from the time of their trauma in which they felt protected, and they remembered moments after arrival in the refuge country in which they felt loved and cared about. The experience of meaning and purpose in life include living in a safe environment and world, raising up a good generation, being men of good reputation and of influence, and respecting human freedom. The participants' final message was this: good values are what matters the most to live a life of fulfillment. The final chapter provides an opportunity for reflection on the results and implications of these findings. Limitations of this study and areas for future research are also presented.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

This study explored how three adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in the wake of their suffering. The participants were asked the following eight research questions:

1. Please share as much as you feel comfortable with about your experience as an Iraqi refugee during the 2003 Iraq War.
2. How did you feel and cope at that time?
3. What kept you going?
4. How did you manage to survive?
5. What feelings do you have now when you think about your past experience?
6. What, if anything, positive emerged from your experience with suffering?
7. How, if at all, do you experience meaning and hope in the wake of your suffering?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Information provided related to participants' experiences came through their engagement and interaction with the research questions, reviews of emerging themes after each interview, and the researcher's personal journal. Because a qualitative phenomenology approach was selected for this study, the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1990) were followed in interacting with, processing, and explicating the findings. A comprehensive presentation of findings was provided in Chapter Four.

This chapter explains how the findings can be applied to the existing literature on the experience of meaning and purpose during suffering among adult Iraqi refugees and then provides a section on the credibility and validity of the research findings. The implications of

these findings are numerous and will be explained in terms of their implications for trauma rehabilitation programs, counselors, and counselor educators. This will be followed by a consideration of the study's limitations and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with a final summary of this research project as a whole.

Interpretation of Findings

Research questions in this study led to the identification of themes that can be related to findings from existing literature. Research questions allowed participants to talk about their trauma experiences to the extent they felt comfortable, to share specifically about their coping strategies, feelings, thoughts, and discoveries, and finally, to discuss in greater detail how they experience meaning in their suffering. Since some themes overlap and share common concepts, themes from all research questions are organized into four major themes to provide greater clarity and avoid unnecessary repetition. Thus, major themes will serve as a helpful framework for evaluating findings in light of existing literature. The following sections explore ways that the findings inform and are informed by the existing body of literature on meaning-making in the wake of suffering among refugees. The findings point to the relationship between existing literature and notable themes that were identified by this study. The four major themes are as follows: sectarianism, violence, and insecurity as the source of participants' suffering; moving from suffering to hope and survival; goodness emerging from suffering; and the experience of meaning and hope in the wake of suffering. Where relevant, the conceptual framework of meaning-making in suffering is revisited in order to explore how the present findings both support and enhance this framework. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the research questions and their respective themes and subthemes.



Figure 1. Research questions, themes, and subthemes.

Theme One: Sectarianism, Violence, and Insecurity as the Source of Participants' Suffering

Research question one asked participants to share as much as they felt comfortable about their experience as an Iraqi refugee during the 2003 Iraq War. Participants shared their stories of

pain and suffering, which revolved around acts of injustice, cruelty, and violence due to sectarianism. They shared about their feelings of being disappointed and, insecure over the shocking changes in their society due to growing violent conflicts between Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'as. Al-Nasr al-Abyad described his experience by saying:

It was a big shock not just to me, but to the whole population; no one expected that to happen—the bombing of Iraq, the explosions, the war, and the people who got killed; it was a big trauma. We lived a safe life before 2003, and all of a sudden we became enemies of one another where a brother hates his own brother. . . . I found out that my friends were my enemies—when you sit with someone before the events and you are friends, but after the events they flip on you just because of your religious doctrine.

Such acts forced the participants to leave their homes and country seeking safety and refuge in Jordan.

Participants' statements that their felt sense of insecurity forced them to flee their homes in Iraq and that they have experienced psychosocial trauma and hardship due to displacement are consistent with findings from studies by Lischer (2008) and Mowafi and Spiegel (2008). Participants' experiences related to sectarian violence is consistent with reports from a number of studies (Cordesman, 2015; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Sassoon, 2009; Stacy, 2012) that Iraqi people have suffered the tragedies of bloodshed, violent acts, and political persecution for decades in the context of war and torture and have been subjected to years of discrimination, persecution, and forced exile. Such shocking change in their communities damaged their sense of security in the world they live in. Trauma effects become even more challenging to the well-being of a survivor when there is a sense of uncertainty about their purpose in life (Frankl, 1969/2014). In the midst of senseless, meaningless situations, the participants in this study

decided to rise above what they could not control to help themselves and their families survive. The following theme explores their attitude in the face of tragedy and their objection to such acts of violence and discrimination based on religious affiliation.

Theme Two: From Suffering to Hope and Survival

Various common themes from questions two, three, four, and five are combined to form the second major theme. Question two inquired about participants' feelings and coping strategies during their times of suffering, and question three sought to learn what kept participants going. Question four aimed to understand how participants managed to survive, and finally, question five gave participants an opportunity to share what feelings they have when thinking about past experiences. While answering question two and question five, participants expressed feelings of guilt, hopelessness, bitterness, injustice, loss, and being caught between the past and present. Participants believed that they needed to be strong and to overcome hopelessness with hope. The participants' concern for their family and children's safety, expressed through their responses to questions three and four, gave them hope and helped them to survive and keep going and to act responsibly in the face of their past and current suffering, as they discussed in their responses to question one.

Participants' description of what they felt and how they coped during their trauma experience revealed a set of thoughts, feelings, and questions that explains the extreme stress they experienced. Their traumatic experiences appeared to have challenged some of preexisting assumptions they were holding (e.g. "Bad things do not happen to good people," "Good people deserve good treatment," "People are trustworthy," and "The world is safe"; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Experiencing trauma resulted in a change in the way participants view the world, as they now describe it as unjust (Vis & Boynton, 2008). This discrepancy between the situation (e.g.,

bad things happening to good people) and their global assumptions became incomprehensible and caused them to experience a level of psychological distress (feelings of inappropriate guilt, hopelessness, bitterness, injustice, loss, and being caught between the past and present). A pathway to reduce this level of stress is the search for meaning, which is initiated by asking questions in an attempt to make the event comprehensible (Park, 2010). Initial attempts led the participants to ask questions: Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do people kill innocent people? What is wrong with me? The participants also wished to die. The tragic situations faced by the participants were at odds with their typical patterns of looking at the world; they needed cognitive resources to assimilate this new information with their existing schemas (Falsetti, Resick, & Davis, 2003). Thus, Bashar Mahmoud shared:

I never hurt anyone and I never carried a weapon. I felt helpless. I started questioning myself—if I've been doing it wrong for the past 44 years. I felt that life was over, that life had no taste anymore.

Al-Nasr al-Abyad echoed his sentiments:

I hated life; we wished to die. . . . Yes, I wished I could die and get it over it. . . . What did we do to deserve all that? Because we are Sunni or because Saddam went down? Where did we do wrong? Why is everybody killing each other?

Al-Shaker lamented, “It is not my fault. . . . If they ask for something that I can’t provide, I feel remiss.” Intense stressors violate people’s beliefs about the world and their perceived ability to achieve valued goals (Steger et al., 2015). Consistent with Currier, Holland, and Malott’s (2015) explanation of moral injury, participants shared their feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, shame, and guilt over the violence their families witnessed and experienced. Clarke and Borders (2014) indicated that survivors make sense of what happened to them through the spiritual

framework they applied to their life narratives. In their attempt to answer the question, “How and why did that happen to me?” participants described their past, present, and future as the work of spiritual forces and explained their belief that bad things happened because of curses by evil spirits. However, contrary to Clark and Borders’s (2014) findings, the participants in this study condemned such acts of violence and held individuals who practiced such acts of violence responsible. They interpreted such experiences as God testing or shaping them to become more patient. Consistent with how the participants viewed good things as “divine protection and provision,” the participants in Clarke and Borders’s study (2014) attributed good things to the work of God.

Unlike soldiers who felt emotionally and morally challenged by what they had seen (Brenner et al., 2015), the Iraqi refugees in this study felt a wider range of distressing emotions due to both witnessing inhuman acts and personally experiencing them. In such situations, it was their hope that helped them to cope. Hope was reflected in their way of thinking about their own goals and their determination to achieve their goals by looking to the future and by taking advantage of available resources (Snyder et al., 1990). Participants’ trust in people helped them to restore their lost hope and cope with their suffering. Their determination to survive activated their good memories, their past experiences, and their imagination. Remembering when his wife would leave to stay with her parents in another area temporarily, Al-Shaker stated, “I was sure she would come back, yes; I felt confident that her brother would bring her back.” Bashar-Mahmoud echoed this sense of trust when recounting the help he received from his neighbor: “I had hope that he would help me because we’d been neighbors for a long time—for 30 years we were good neighbors.” Al-Nasr al-Abyad also discussed his hope:

I imagined that the UNHCR approved my resettlement and me and my wife and kids were on the plane, and I would then have hope. I would picture the images—that, for example, we reached a different country, and we settled in a big house, and my children went to school and I had a new home country where I felt safety and stability. I would picture these images to give me hope to overcome the thoughts of the horrifying events.

These findings align with those from Aromur's (2010) study, which indicate that what mattered most to Holocaust survivors was keeping themselves and their hope alive. Survivors stayed alive by refusing to consider the option of quitting, overcoming whatever threatened their survival, implementing creative solutions, and acting responsibly toward themselves and others. They kept hope alive by believing in liberation and attaching to personal fantasies of what the future might hold. Similarly, hope and love for their families made participants in this study believe that they needed to be strong if they wanted to save them. Hope and love became their major motivation for survival and helped participants endure and cope with the unbearable and senseless situations. At moments of despair, they refused to give up and stayed determined to continue on their survival journey. Participants' response to their despair supports existing research (Goodman, 2016) that suggests that believing one's life has purpose, whether to represent one's family or to help others in the future, provides meaning and helps survivors resist despair. These beliefs facilitated coping by helping participants in this study make sense out of their experiences (Goodman, 2016). Participants' families and children were the only things that kept them going. Existing research (Meade, 2011) revealed that that family centrality was another type of meaning created in the lives of Holocaust survivors. This study has revealed that family safety is the central theme of the goals that kept Iraqi participants going. This is a unique finding which adds to the existing body of research on refugees who have survived trauma.

Altruism and love for the others gave them the hope and energy to reach their goal. It was their families that helped them make the shift from hopelessness to hope and from feeling inadequate to believing in their past knowledge and experience. Their concern for their families empowered them to stay strong for the sake of their families. Love for their families was behind their deep felt sense of responsibility, which motivated them to use wisdom in their actions and decisions to help them survive. It is their love for their families that helped them to cope with their trauma, to keep going, and to survive.

Victor Frankl's (1946/2006) theoretical framework explains human freedom to responsibly choose one's actions and attitudes when faced with unavoidable traumatic situations. Participants shared that they have gone through traumatic situations in which they had to make immediate decisions, take risks, and sacrifice to rescue their families. Participants' deep sense of responsibility as fathers led them to respond wisely and take action to give their families a chance to survive. Saving their families was their main goal during life-threatening experiences. Their attitude of responsible leadership caused them to refuse to live under cruelty, violence, and injustice. They were able to take risks, move from one place to another, bear psychological suffering, and sacrifice everything but their families' survival and safety. Their survival goal caused participants to experience times of separation from their wives and children (Ajdukovic, 2004) and their strong sense of valuing the gift of life in spite of tragedy was found essential to surviving trauma and suffering (Frankl, 1946/2006). Al-Nasr al-Abyad described his determination to keep his family safe:

If you live with hope, you become strong. When you have a goal you want to reach, you will try to be strong in order to achieve your goal. I had made up my mind to leave Iraq no matter what because Iraq is not a country of stability.

In conclusion, family safety and participants' sense of well-being are two sides of the same coin.

Participants expressed various emotions when they thought of their past. They felt that they were still reaping the consequences of cruel acts of injustice in the present. They still suffer psychological symptoms and emotional distress, including feelings of bitterness and anger; loss of money, status, and work; poor health; social isolation; and uncertainty. They shared feelings of worry and concern over their children's future and felt fatigue from their temporary resettlement in Jordan while awaiting uncertain permanent resettlement, and their challenging economic status (Bjawi-Levine, 2009; Pickartz, 2009), battling unemployment and poverty, and this reality influenced their health, nutrition, education, and housing (Lischer, 2008; Mowafi & Spiegel, 2008). This finding is consistent with El-Shaarawi's (2015) explanation that Iraqi refugees' experience of uncertainty about their future and life instability cause them significant stress and suffering; participants in this study shared of their continued suffering in the refuge country in spite of feeling safe. Al-Shaker commented:

When I was wounded I didn't cry; I was young with a future ahead of me, and I visited a lot of countries. Yes, I was upset, but I didn't cry; even when my health deteriorated, I didn't cry, even though I was in a lot of pain, and I heard the doctor talk about my condition and I didn't cry. But now I cried because of my children and our financial situation and the challenges I am facing.

Regardless of their suffering from past tragedy and of all kinds of hardship, their journey of searching for meaning continues to allow them to see goodness emerging out of their suffering.

Theme Three: Goodness Emerging out of Suffering

What, if anything, positive emerged from your experience with suffering? This question generated two primary themes: unforgettable moments of divine protection and unforgettable

moments of priceless gifts. These are combined with primary theme two, learned lessons and “growing wisdom,” that emerged from question five, which is related to participants’ feelings when they recall their past experience. As participants remembered their past experiences, they shared about lessons that they learned. They also remembered life-threatening moments where they felt protected by divine intervention or God. Divine intervention was not limited to the experience of God as a protector but extended to the experience of him as a provider.

Victor Frankl (1946/2006) suggests that humans are capable of turning negative life events into something constructive and positive. This ability allows for one to change and take responsible action when unable to change the situation. Therefore, one can relate to suffering with a favorable attitude, learn a lesson, find positive meaning in a negative experience, revise life goals and global beliefs, make the best of any given situation, transform personal tragedy into a triumph, and transcend tragedy by cultivating spirituality (Frankl, 1946/2006). PTG occurs when an individual makes sense of trauma by acknowledging the positive change that happened after the trauma (Park, 2010). As participants remembered their past experiences, they became aware of the lessons they learned throughout their lives. Lessons of wisdom gave them insight and provided them with the knowledge that will help them move forward. A change in Bashar-Mahmoud’s beliefs brought him more insight: “I realized that there is more to it than just that; a man is not only responsible for himself, but there are other people’s lives depending on him.” Similarly, Al-Nasr Al-Abyad pointed out that “one should leave a positive impact wherever he can, even with his friends, even if it was just a simple word.” This finding correlates with Brenner et al.’s (2015) study, which showed that veterans reported feeling more mature and competent and were able to make meaning through the good deeds they performed during their deployment and the difference they made in others’ lives such as bringing pleasure

to kids by giving them meals and candy. Participants' attitudes and learned lessons indicate their ability to find a way to weave the traumatic events into their narrative in a way that makes sense to integrate the event into their personal story. This suggests that a change has occurred in self-perception and identity (Park, 2010). Findings among Iraqi refugees include improved relationships, enhanced personal resources and coping skills, and a greater appreciation for life; these findings are consistent with Park & Helgeson's (2006). Participants recounted unforgettable moments of near-death experiences and unexpected ways their families survived. They narrated stories and reflected on moments of divine protection when they gained a greater appreciation for life. When describing the time he witnessed a car bombing, Al-Shaker said, "The whole area was destroyed. I survived more than one dangerous situation. It's God's will, and it's what God wanted, so I had the hope and the conviction that it's all in God's hands." Al Nasr-al Abyad explained his outlook on the challenges he faced: "I considered it a test. God was testing me, that after all the tragedies there will come a better time when I would be relieved. It is God's doing." Bashar Mahmoud's experience of divine protection came in the form of help from an unexpected figure: "Thank God that when a door closes, another opens." These components of faith in God's will parallel Puvimanasinghe et al.'s (2014) finding that participants' steadfast religious faith gave participants consolation and hope throughout their journeys from their home country to Australia, and God continued to answer their prayers. In this study, some Sierra Leoneans, including two Muslim participants, attributed their overall life experiences to "God's will" or "destiny," and their evaluative accounts indicated how they were making sense of their suffering and hardship by maintaining congruity between religious beliefs and the perception of their realities. This enabled them to cope with distress and simultaneously reach out to others. Participants' narratives indicated that by attributing their life trajectories to

“God’s will” and “destiny,” they were holding steadfastly to their globally held religious beliefs despite the severity and length of their traumatic experiences. They were also focusing on making sense of their positive experiences as well as their hardships. The attribution of their survival and salvation to divine intervention appeared to strengthen their religious beliefs, which in turn afforded them with a coping mechanism to continue with life and maintain hope for the future (Puvimanasinghe et al., 2014).

In Larner’s (2013) study, veterans reported improved relationships with significant others after their deployment. The findings indicated that certain global beliefs are most protective when they are shared with significant people in one’s life, particularly those in one’s family of origin, which remains a resource as well as a source of support after the combat deployment. Perhaps this explains what Bashar Mahmoud reflected by saying:

What I learned is that a person can’t tolerate all the pain alone; there were many things I kept from my wife, but when I saw that she was willing to work cleaning houses to provide us with money for rent and for treatment, I felt that someone was sharing my pain. . . . This meant a great deal to me. Having someone love me for me, the good and the bad in me, gave me power to continue.

What is unique about the Iraqis’ experiences are the moments of divine protection and provision supported with specific examples. Perhaps this finding emerged because the participants were given an opportunity to recall moments when they experienced positive things in the midst of their tough circumstances. If this question had not been asked, such experiences could have been undermined.

Theme Four: The Experience of Meaning and Hope in the Wake of Suffering

Four themes, living in a safe environment and world, raising up a good generation, good reputation and influence, and respect of humans' freedom emerged from question seven, which asked participants how they experience meaning and hope in the wake of suffering. These themes are combined with the last theme, moral values matter the most in life, which emerged from question eight, which asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to share.

Participants' experience of meaning and hope in their suffering is associated with their experience of living in a safe world. In that safe world, their purpose in life is to raise up a good generation of children, teaching them good values and morals where the value of respect for human freedom is esteemed. Their self-worth as fathers and their need to feel significant form their identities and drive them to become humans of influence and of good reputation.

Frankl's early work (1946/2006) stressed the importance of values as part of living a meaningful life. Participants' past experience of violence and discrimination caused their world to be perceived as an unsafe place to live. Participants described an unjust world free of good morals and ethical values, a world that disrespects humanity and violates basic human needs and the right to live and practice good values. Humans desire and need to live a meaningful life and have purpose. That purpose makes life worth living. To make sense of the incomprehensible acts they have witnessed and experienced, the participants' purpose in life became to be active agents and regain a sense of order and control (Park, 2010). Their role is in alignment with their identity as fathers of good reputation and their purpose of raising up good generation where they learn and practice good morals and values where respect for humanity exists. These findings are consistent with Armour's (2010) findings, which showed that during their resettlement, Holocaust survivors' focus was on reconstructing their life and regaining what they had lost.

They accomplished this by being proactive in their attitude, maintaining a sense of gratitude, having faith in self and God, accepting their circumstances, becoming free of bitterness, and doing whatever helped them to move forward in their life. They were pursuing education, building a family, and raising up children by being successful, working hard, leaving their past behind them, and focusing on their present and future. What is unique about Iraqi refugees in this study is their focus on raising up their children on good values, having a good reputation themselves, and focusing on their children's education when they were not allowed to work while hoping for resettlement in another country where they could rebuild their lives. Giorgio's (2016) participants felt they had experienced post-deployment growth related to their vocational goals. Also Clarke and Borders's (2014) study findings indicate that Liberian refugees who were settled in the United States coped with their refugee experience by adopting culturally sanctioned attitudes such as being serious, working hard, and displaying gratitude as they focused on the positive aspects of resettlement to take advantage of opportunities, particularly education and employment, they did not have in their home. In contrast, the Iraqi participants in this study are not allowed to work; they have minimal resources and opportunities in the refuge country. Therefore, vocational goals are not their current focus although they wish to obtain permits to work. The advantage of living in Jordan for this study's participants is limited to feeling safe and living in an environment with more palatable values and ethics. For the participants, the opportunity to maintain their children's education is one of their main goals and is a requirement rather than an advantage of the place they reside.

The participants became a voice that calls for the world to value what matters the most in life: good morals and values. Findings of this study support Victor Frankl's (1946/2006) framework that meaning can discovered by creating a work or doing a deed, by experiencing

something, and by taking the right attitude toward unavoidable suffering. Turning one's predicament into a human achievement and purpose in life (Frankl, 1969/2014) allows individuals to find something that makes life worth living. Participants allowed themselves to take responsible actions in the face of irresponsible acts of violence (Frankl, 1946/2006). Participants coped by revising their life goals to make the best of their situation, transforming personal tragedy into triumph, and transcending tragedy by cultivating spirituality in the form of good morals and values (Frankl, 1946/2006). Fulfilling such meaningful goals "to raise up a good generation" gave participants the ability to live their life purposefully and cope with their suffering. For Frankl, this is an indicator of humans' spiritual nature. Participants' ability to integrate traumatic events into their personal story suggests that a change has occurred in their self-perception and identity (Park, 2010). On the other hand, personal significance can be achieved when people appraise and interpret what they have gained from the experience in terms of personal skills, relationships, life philosophy, and worldview (Joseph & Linley, 2005). Study findings confirm that participants overcome evil with good when they refuse to give up, insist on rising above the hardships of their circumstances, hold on to humane values, and find meaning in the seemingly meaningless process of suffering (Shantall, 1999).

Participants in this study provided unique and valuable information about their experiences and how they experience meaning and hope in their suffering. The next section will shed light on the trustworthiness, transparency, and triangulation of the research process.

Credibility and Validity of Findings

Following a long process of CVT's review of my research proposal and the IRB's approval of my research application, I obtained a list of potential participants from the Monitoring and Evaluation Department at CVT that included Iraqi individuals who were former

clients, were age 30 or older, had consent on file with CVT for their data to be used for research purposes, had completed a six-month follow-up assessment, had expressed interest in interviews when asked at the six-month follow-up assessment, and had completed individual and/or group therapy. I followed the initial contact procedure with potential participants (Appendix D). I selected potential participants randomly from the list by drawing numbers which had been assigned to each individual. I initially contacted three potential participants by phone out of 19 listed, and all three showed interest in participating in the research at first contact, something I did not expect. Those who agreed to participate were informed by the researcher that they could bring a family member or a friend to accompany if it made them feel safer. They were informed that during the time of the interview, the person they brought would wait in another room on the same flat. Unexpectedly, Al-Naser al Abyad brought a friend with him whom I discovered to be one of the potential participants on the list. He showed interest in participating in the study but had a family situation that prevented him from staying long enough to complete a full interview. I agreed to give him some time after I completed the interview with Al-Naser al Abyad so he could share what he wished to. During this time, he shared briefly about his past trauma experience, and the rest of the time was focused on research questions related to what kept him going; how he managed to survive; what, if anything, positive emerged from his experience with suffering; and how, if at all, he experiences meaning and hope in the wake of suffering. I obtained his consent to use this data to support research findings, and he provided demographic information and chose a pseudonym.

Al-Shamri is a 43-year-old Iraqi, Muslim Sunni. He is married and has three children. He has college degree in agriculture and formerly worked at the Ministry of Agriculture in Basra. He arrived in Jordan in 2017. Al-Shamri felt motivated to share his experience and revealed that

shortly before he arrived in Jordan, he was beaten and kidnapped by Shi'a militia men who entered his home and beat his 15-year-old son. His son fainted, and since that time he has been completely unable to speak. Creswell (2007) recommended multiple sources of data collection, also known as triangulation. I consider data obtained from this interview as another source of information that supports the credibility and validity of findings. The following section examines this source of data in the light of study findings and emerged themes.

Triangulation

The four major themes are supported by what Al-Shamri shared during a short interview.

Theme one: Sectarianism, violence and insecurity as the source of participants' suffering. Al-Shamri shared that he was beaten and kidnapped by Shi'a militia because he was Sunni. One of the militia men slapped his 15-year-old son in the face, and his son fainted and has remained mute since then. He elaborated: "I am not weak, but because I was part of the minority, I was weakened. . . . I have lost trust in people during violence." Al-Shamri fled Iraq seeking safety for his family. He described his current life as a "slow death" and stated "I live in a desert," meaning that he is facing tough life circumstance with the lack of financial resources and medical conditions of his wife and children.

Theme two: From suffering to hope and survival. In alignment with the second theme, Al-Shamri shared, "I will not give up myself to be victim of injustice." He described himself as a "simple" yet strong man. He was able to help his family survive and to protect their "dignity." He was able to use wisdom and patience and to sacrifice everything, including "his home and work," for the sake of bringing his children to what he describes as a "safe shore." He said, "I feel proud that I have made the decision to flee in order to protect my children and keep them safe. I feel a sense of achievement."

Theme three: Goodness emerging out of suffering. When Al-Shamri was asked if he can see anything positive that emerged from suffering, he said, “Hope has emerged from pain. I walked through darkness to the light and from being weak to become strong. Pain made me determined to face the challenges in life.” He mentioned that although he lacks the financial resources to support his family, yet he is trying his best to be a responsible father and make his children happy with little things. He strives to help them understand that life has both “bitterness and sweetness.” He, like the other participants, had an experience of divine provision. He mentioned that one day as he was riding the bus back to his home, he was thinking of his family’s needs and had this wish and had this self-talk “I wish that I would just have 50 Jordanian dinar—how I could get it?” He continued,

When I arrived home, my wife told me that a local NGO called her and told her that they had for us a 50 dinars and food parcel. . . . God never forgets anyone. . . . God who has rescued me and my children from death will help me.

Theme four: The experience of meaning and hope in the wake of suffering. When Al-Shamri shared about his experience of meaning and purpose in suffering, he began by saying, I am a man of ambition; I look toward the future, and I wanted to make a difference in people’s lives. I want to see what is good, and I wanted to make people around me feel happy because I was treated unjustly. I do not want to see anyone is treated unjustly. I feel others’ pain.

Although he mentioned that he sometimes hates life, he discovered that he is able to face life’s challenges and live in integrity. He revealed his self-worth by saying “My true value as a human is that I am still holding on good values, and I respect human freedom.” He mentioned that his purpose in life is to keep his children away from violence and “hard-hearted men.” His

purpose is to be a good influence on his children and teach them good values such as being kind to others, honest, respectful, and loving. He concluded by saying, “I do not seek entertainment. . . . I wanted education and health for my children.” His final piece of advice to other refugees was to maintain hope and live the present while not allowing the past pain of injustice to repeat itself in the present.

Implications for Social Change

Findings have relevant implications on the field of trauma rehabilitation. This section will explore how the present findings might help to address recognized needs for social change. Participants in this study revealed that their war trauma experience confronted their very sense of safety, security, and trust in the world. Results also show the devastating psychological effects of trauma, including the men’s experience of a wide range of overwhelming feelings, including guilt, shame, anger, insecurity, and injustice. Negative effects of past experiences also cause them to experience overwhelming feelings of inadequacy when facing current challenges in the refuge country, including minimal financial resources, and lack of job opportunities. They continue to reap the consequences of the cruel acts of violence and injustice that caused them to flee their country with empty hands. Although UNHCR’s and other NGOs’ involvement has been crucial to their survival, findings of this study reveal a need for a well-structured and committed approach to provide protection and enable access to needed services for Iraqi refugees (Stevens, 2013). As mentioned in Chapter One, experiencing a trauma can change the way an individual sees the world (Vis & Boynton, 2008). Judith Herman (1992) stated, “Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning” (p. 33). In this way, trauma is a central attack on the existential component of human spirituality. Human spirituality is the pathway through which most trauma survivors

restore or replace lost existential meaning and hope for the future (Smith, 2004). Once these beliefs have been reassessed, the new spiritual understanding may become a tool through which the trauma can be processed. Throughout their interaction with research questions, participants emphasized and explored significant concepts of identity, sense of responsibility, justice, values, faith, hope, and meaning and purpose in life. Findings provide evidence of the importance of addressing concepts related to human spirituality when treating war trauma survivors.

Processing a traumatic event leads to a search for new meaning and purpose as well as a need for the individual to make sense of the trauma experience. Trauma may serve as a tool to help survivors overcome suffering by allowing them to experience and find meaning and purpose in their life in a way that may not have been possible otherwise. It is evident that although war trauma has confronted the very core of participants' existence, the direction and focus of research questions helped them to become aware of and disclose existing powerful concepts of growth, resilience, and meaning and purpose in life. Human spirituality is the pathway through which most trauma survivors restore or replace lost existential meaning and hope for the future (Smith, 2004). When individuals face tragic situations that are at odds with their typical patterns of looking at the world, they need cognitive resources to assimilate this new information with existing schemas (Falsetti et al., 2003). Thus, it is essential to provide survivors an opportunity in a helping relationship to utilize cognitive resources by asking the right questions to stimulate aspects of meaning and purpose. Without such space to utilize cognitive resources and attempt to make sense of their traumatic experience, survivors may continue to face existential crises and suffer feelings of meaninglessness, loneliness, and despair. Studies provide evidence of the importance of spirituality as a vehicle of healing for traumatized individuals (De Castella & Simmonds, 2013; Fox, 2012; Skogrand et al., 2007). Findings of this study provide evidence of

the importance of utilizing spiritual concepts such as meaning and purpose in life and hope. Spiritual resources are helpful tools through which war trauma survivors can find strength and able to cope with their difficulties. If such resources that already exist within individuals who have experienced trauma, it would seem that counselors and counseling educators should give these domains of experience sufficient space and attention in treatment. Facilitating the process of finding meaning and purpose in suffering in the life of war trauma survivors can infuse them with hope, allow them to feel supported, and empower them to reassess and fulfill their life goals. Additionally, utilizing spiritual resources brings forth the resilient aspects of survivors' identity and inspires them to view themselves as agents of good influence where their lost senses of self-worth and control are restored. Rather than only focusing on posttraumatic stress symptomology, a broadened perspective on human experience that includes resiliency aspects can lead toward a more balanced approach to understanding trauma survivors and the path to recovery. This research provides important, helpful information to mental health professionals working with refugees and in particular Iraqi refugees. It reveals unique components of what gives adult Iraqi refugees meaning and purpose in life in the wake of their suffering. Such components could be commonly experienced among other refugees in the world. It is valuable to look at these components since each individual is unique, including when it comes to individual different traumatic experiences, statuses, and cultural and religious backgrounds. What is unique about Iraqi refugees' experience of meaning and purpose in life is their focus on the importance of human morality. This is reflected in the way they value their personal identity as men of good reputation and influence through raising up children to be a good generation that respects human freedom. Spiritual experiences with divine provision and protection reveal

important aspects of their spiritual experiences and faith. Family is central to their drive to continue living and endure suffering.

This study provides encouragement and help for mental health professionals who are frustrated by the continuous suffering of their clients and the lack of available resources. In addition, the study provides information to help expand effective treatment of the human spirit and the dignity of Arab refugees in particular, as well as others who suffer and have lost meaning and hope in life.

One could imagine the impact of undermining the opportunity to utilize trauma survivors' powerful internal resources when such resources are overlooked or minimized throughout the course of treatment. It is of great importance for therapists to stay mindful throughout treatment and to allow for conversations with their clients that help in addressing particular challenges presented by individual worldviews in coming to terms with suffering and perhaps reconstructing worldviews trauma has shattered. Therapists who understand the importance of those concerns help their clients feel understood and heard and give them opportunity to think through their own beliefs and doubts. Effective treatments facilitate the construction or the discovery of adaptive perspectives on life, discovery of new opportunities and learned lessons, finding meaning in suffering, and setting life goals. The next section draws on this study's findings to provide a number of concrete recommendations for action.

Recommendations for Action

By emphasizing both the importance of addressing components of meaning and purpose in suffering in the lives of refugees who survived war trauma and the gap in the existing body of research on understanding how refugees and in particular Iraqi refugees experience of meaning and purpose in the wake of their suffering, this study highlighted the need for more deliberate

efforts to adequately understand meaning and purpose in suffering and the need to include an emphasis on meaning in therapy to promote trauma recovery. Studies provide evidence of the importance of spirituality as a vehicle of healing for traumatized individuals (De Castella & Simmonds, 2013; Fox, 2012; Skogrand et al., 2007). The review of literature in Chapter Three indicates remarkable interest in meaning making in recent years in research and how meaning matters for human well-being. Individuals who have experienced trauma are in need of customized approaches that create space for them to explore aspects of meaning while respecting their individual uniqueness in terms of their cultural background, gender, age and social status. Models that suggest that stressful events may violate individuals' sense of meaning making (Park, 2010) are widely accepted as accurate descriptions of the process of recovery from highly stressful events and form the basis of a variety of approaches to clinical interventions for trauma (Monson et al., 2006). Trauma recovery treatment models that include components of meaning and purpose in life promote healing when counselors help their clients identify areas in which they find meaning. Clinicians working in the field of trauma therapy may better support trauma survivors throughout their healing journey by addressing oft-overlooked inner resources related to their inner being and spirit (Altmaier, 2013). Gregory and Prana's (2013) study found that the use of the CR model was instrumental in increasing PTG in participants. The results revealed that the participants' strong traditional beliefs had been practiced regularly; most participants had a strong faith system that was active and important to them. In this study, domains that gave meaning to the participants were their love for their children; their sense of good reputation identity; their values, where respect for humanity was of high importance; and their view of a safe world where morals and ethics are practiced. Interventions that promote components of spirituality are worthy of further evaluation to ensure the presence of simple and practical steps

to assist clinicians in their work with war trauma survivors whenever components of meaning are addressed. A review of findings from this study may provide some clues about how other trauma rehabilitation programs and services can be usefully refined and enhanced.

These findings may prove beneficial for a number of distinct populations and arenas. This study adds to needed international counseling literature and indigenous research in general. Counselor educators and clinical advisors may also benefit from the findings of this study by incorporating components of meaning in therapy in clinical training programs. Focused attention on the experience of meaning and purpose and the development of competencies for clinical work with refugees who survived war trauma should be embedded in the curriculum of all counselor education programs. Trainings for counselors on how to apply the theory of meaning and purpose may lead to more effective practice. Perhaps incorporating sessions in which students and counselors engage in personal reflective activities themselves to promote their understanding of the concepts of meaning before administering them to their clients would sharpen therapists' skills. Perhaps understanding how meaning in life is experienced among war trauma survivors in particular and how it may be experienced differently than for those who have other forms of trauma experience would help in customizing treatment approaches to meet the need of a particular population. Among those who could benefit from this research are other refugees around the world of who survived trauma, particularly Iraqi refugees. Relevant findings from this study might also be disseminated to refugees in various settings through seminars, presentations, and further scholarly writing. It is of high importance for trauma rehabilitation programs to give a voice to refugees who survived war trauma and for advocacy programs to give opportunities for refugees to share their survival stories so that they feel empowered and supported and to allow a shift in focus to highlight positive learned lessons. Giving refugees a

voice will enhance their experience of finding meaning in life in their suffering when their stories are shared and their senses of justice and self-worth as individuals who can influence the world around them are promoted. Refugees who survived war trauma have great influence when they call for a world that respects human freedom, a world where ethics and morals prevail over evil practices, a world that respects children and their right to live in safety.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Limitations

This study was designed based on the state of current research on the topic of investigation and was guided by a set of specific research questions. This qualitative phenomenology study sought to shed light on how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in the wake of their suffering due to the lack of research on this topic. A limitation to this study involves the use of a small select criterion sample (Creswell, 2007). Participants for this study were selected because they all completed therapy at CVT. While participants' completion of therapy enabled them to speak meaningfully on the topic of investigation, it may limit the generalizability of their perspectives to broader populations of refugees. It is worth noting that this qualitative study allowed understanding of unique perspectives and meaning within this specific population. Creswell (2007) noted that the objective of qualitative research is application rather than generalizability. In addition, participants were also a homogenous group: They all are male, are married with children, had some college or advanced professional training, identified as Muslim Sunnis, and were between the ages of 43 and 60. Presenting the research questions to a larger and more diverse group of Iraqi refugees, including single adult males and females, married women, married individuals with no children, widows, those from other religious backgrounds such as Christians and

Sabinas, and non-religious individuals may help to refine and expand the applicability of the present findings and to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon.

The subjective nature of my judgments and interpretations of the self-reported data is recognized as a limitation to the findings. My ongoing critical dialogue with the empirical literature, continuous checking with the participants during the interview for accurate understanding, and member checking after each interview on emerged themes to confirm the credibility of the narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000) reduced these limitations. They are further addressed by explicit acknowledgment of personal interest and potential bias—areas that were addressed in Chapter Three.

Contrary to my expectation to have participants from different religious backgrounds, all participants were Muslim Sunni. I had hoped to have participants who would reflect the human experience of searching for meaning in suffering as spiritual beings regardless of religious background. I am also aware that participants' religious views and beliefs might influence how they experience meaning in the wake of suffering and cause them to share common themes. I expect that variation regarding religious background in the sample may lead to variations among participants and bring new knowledge to the body of research.

My role was that of a qualitative researcher, but I have my own views on meaning and purpose in the wake of suffering that are influenced by my Christian faith. This might lead to an opportunity for bias. To ensure trustworthiness of data, my role as a researcher as well as my beliefs and perspectives were described in Chapter Three.

While I am aware of this study's limitations, I still believe that this study is informative because it is the first study that sought to understand the phenomenon of meaning making in the face of suffering in Iraqi refugees.

Recommendations for Further Study

This phenomenological study of how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in the wake of their suffering was designed to shed light on overlooked internal resources that promote psychological healing and recovery for trauma survivors. At the same time, the study served to highlight several important areas that remain poorly understood where further study might be beneficial. While the present study granted access to the experiences of adult Iraqi refugees who completed therapy at CVT, it only tells part of the story. A follow-up study with other adult Iraqi refugees of different backgrounds, genders, religions, social statuses, financial situations, psychological symptoms, would provide a more comprehensive picture of how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in their suffering. Additionally, studies using participants in different locations, at different stages of resettlement, or who received therapy from different centers would be beneficial for these purposes. The experience of meaning and purpose in suffering among Iraqi refugees remains an area that requires further research. This study might be particularly important in understanding how adult male Iraqi refugees who are married and have children experience meaning and purpose in their life. It is worth exploring how single adult Iraqi refugees, widowed males or females, or adults who experienced the loss of their loved ones experience meaning in suffering. Another area of examination could be how adult female Iraqi refugees differentially experience meaning and purpose in their suffering compared to males or compared to their husbands. Perhaps examining how individuals at younger age experience meaning and purpose differently than adult will broaden our understanding of the phenomenon. A broad-based survey of adult Iraqis and those from other nationalities on their perceptions of the role of meaning and purpose in therapy might be useful for establishing the more general perceptions of adult Iraqi refugees—something that

might further shape the development of services and initiatives that are designed to promote recovery.

Relocating the Researcher in Light of the Findings

This research project is born after few years of work at CVT in Jordan. Throughout the years, I was privileged to interact with and observe a quite large number of Arabic-speaking refugees who have survived war trauma, among whom are Iraqi refugees. As a psychosocial counselor, I have worked with torture and war survivors for two years. I have listened over and over to many of clients' stories of how war trauma and forced migration has impacted them and their families psychologically, physically, and socially. I have noticed Iraqi refugees in particular are less fortunate because of the limited social services that they can access while suffering difficult living circumstances. I have noticed a blend of vulnerability and resiliency in those refugees. Because of this observation, a deep passion has developed in me to understand how human beings, in this case Iraqi refugees, maintain hope and purpose in their suffering. Over the last four years, I have been working as a psychotherapist trainer at CVT. The nature of my position allows for continual listening to many heart-wrenching stories of traumatic experience and loss. These profound stories have stirred my desire to understand how one could experience meaning and purpose in life in the face of such suffering, loss, and unbearable life circumstances in the refuge country. I have also noticed that although the concept of meaning in suffering remains inadequately addressed in therapy sessions with these clients, some clients have pointed to the experience of meaning in their suffering and the use of spirituality, hope, posttraumatic growth, and finding new opportunities in life as means of making sense of their trauma and painful memories. I have noticed that the core question that they struggle to answer and understand is why such evil practices have afflicted them. Why has this happened to them in

particular while they are innocent? Having the opportunity to taste part of the pain of suffering that my clients experience by listening to their traumatic stories has increased my passion to provide support and to better empathize and connect with humanity in a meaningful way.

I came into this project with a strong belief in the importance of understanding meaning in life. This belief flowed from my extensive review of literature related to meaning in suffering. I came to this research believing that the research question can be answered best from the personal experience of the survivors themselves by conducting a dialogue (Moustakas, 1990).

As a Christian researcher, I believe that humans are created in the image of God and that hope and meaning in life are reflected in that image. A sense of meaningfulness cannot be experienced away from the creator of the universe. I believe humans' self-worth and true value and dignity originate in being created in the image of God. This image in them is reflected in various ways. The need to live in a peaceful, safe, and orderly world can be understood by humans' need to live morally and ethically. Such values and ethics are originated in the image of the creator in them. They are created to live their live purposefully, and they can better discover that purpose through a living relationship with the creator. They are not called merely to do work but to be agents of good influence in the world and make a difference. I am aware that I am not an unbiased being and that my cultural worldviews have an influence on my understanding of these concepts. Throughout my interaction with participants, I could not view participants as anything other than humans created in the image of God. I could see that image in them in different ways. They all shared about purpose in their life, stressed their need to live in a safe environment where good ethics and values are practiced, and pointed to their need to be efficient "agents of good reputation." I have seen that the concept of self-worth is felt when they

live according to set of values, raise a good generation of children, and are able to provide for their children.

I was also able to recognize when the participants' belief system interprets some events differently than mine. For example, the participants believe that what has happened to them is God's will even though they opposed acts of violence and cruelty and refused it. From a Christian point of view, acts of violence and evil are interpreted based on the belief that humans are free to choose how they think and act and humans in their free will can choose to participate in evil acts toward creation, including toward human beings. Suffering is the product of humans' abuse of their freedom. God who is all good, loving, and powerful is able to transform one's life tragedy and suffering into something that has meaning and value. In sum, he can transform bitterness into sweetness for those who seek his will and purpose in their lives. Romans 8:28 explains Christian view of suffering: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (New International Version).

Humans, too, have the choice to determine how they will respond to their pain and suffering. They can choose to rise above the horror of evil acts and even find meaning in their suffering and choose to live purposefully, effectively, and morally. I also approached the project with an eagerness to learn anything and everything that might improve my own practice as a counselor and trainer and in turn benefit my counselors, educators and service providers. This research has expanded my knowledge and shaped what I already knew about the phenomenon. What caught my attention is that children and family are central to what gives the participants meaning in life. Additionally, maintaining a good reputation and morals and values is another way they can experience meaning in their suffering. I am aware that aspects of the phenomenon

of meaning in suffering remain mysterious and that individual experiences are unique. Although I interviewed only three participants, I felt grateful to observe clearly common themes among them. Although the sample is homogenous, each participant has unique experience, and their educational and social background varied greatly. Although each participant experience is unique, I learned that human suffering and the search for meaning in suffering are universal phenomena. My direct interaction with the participants was an impactful experience that has opened my eyes to understand the experience from their perspective. This has challenged me as a counselor, educator, researcher, and future counselor educator to further research. I have developed a passion to train counselors in this area. In fact, I had an opportunity after I completed writing the results on this study to provide for the first time training for the counselors at CVT through which I came to realize even more the need for further and more efficient trainings where theory on the topic of meaning and purpose in suffering and practice are integrated. I also came to realize the need for counselors who work with war trauma survivors to be given opportunities to reflect on how they themselves experience meaning and purpose in their life as they listen to more and more of stories that may shatter their fundamental assumptions of the world as a safe place.

Human spirituality reflects the image of God in humans, and life becomes meaningful and purposeful when humans' souls seek the creator of the universe, the source of meaning, purpose, and life. I believe that God is the source of every good gift, including the human search for meaning in suffering. My ultimate research goal is to explicate the essence of the phenomenon of meaning in suffering as it exists in the participants' concrete experiences (McLeod, 2011). I believe listening to Iraqi refugees who have direct experience with the phenomenon of meaning in suffering add knowledge and fill a gap in literature when the

research question “How do adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning in the wake of their suffering?” is answered.

I came to acknowledge the importance of giving survivors a voice and saw how giving them this opportunity has impacted them positively. They all shared a felt sense of relief at the end of the interview. It surprised me so much that they all expressed their interest in participating in the research at the initial call that I had doubts as to whether they fully understood what my research was about. The first time I called them, they all felt safe to share details about their past experiences; they also expressed their willingness to use their data to benefit the world. Their attitude has encouraged me, and I felt honored to meet with such heroes. It also motivated me to give this topic more emphasis and pursue further research, study, and exploration. I am passionate about working with counselors, educators, and those who suffer to find practical ways to facilitate awareness and expressions of lasting inner resources where external resources are lacking. Synthesizing research findings and research experiences into a final creative expression is valuable (Moustakas, 1990). The following letter, written by me, grew out of my interaction with the data and envisioning all participants joining together and presenting their message to the world.

A Letter from the Heart of Three Heroes

We want the world to know that we are humans of dignity and spirit. We have witnessed and experienced inhuman acts of injustice and violence to the extent that we wished to die because of the unbearable pain we felt. That very pain became our motivator to survive, to keep going, and to cope. We couldn't imagine the strength of our love for our children. That love gave us the courage to stand in the face of death and evil and to sacrifice everything for the sake of their safety. Yes, we have so little to live with, but now we have so much to live for. We

believed that our lives matter and that there is something to live for. We decided not to give up and not to give ourselves to despair. We stand against all acts of injustice because we are humans. We find life when we live for the sake of others' safety and well-being; we respect humans for their humanity. We are humans who respect the gift of freedom to choose to do what is right. We discovered that there is no safe world where discrimination, inequality, and disrespect for humans exist. Because we are humans of value and dignity, we refuse to live in such communities. Our goal in life is to raise up our children in a safe environment and to teach them good values and that their self-worth is not based on material things because they are spiritual beings. We want to teach them what matters most in life: morals in an immoral world. We want to teach them respect for other humans, honesty, love for others, and not to hurt anyone because we have tasted the pain of being hurt. We want to be, not to feel. We want to be men, fathers, husbands, and friends of good reputation and of influence. Our message to those who suffer is to never give up. Hope and life are stronger than despair and death; love is stronger than hatred. Through our suffering, we have discovered and learned valuable things that we would have never experienced otherwise. We have experienced the protection and provision of the God of the universe. Suffering made us stronger; we became heroes; we have something to share with the world. Suffering led us to discover and value what is most profound in life: finding meaning and purpose in suffering, that is, to love and to be loved. In conclusion, we are like white eagles: our hearts are pure and courageous; we love life; we love freedom; we have hope. Like the white eagle, we feel in control through our difficulties. We are strong.

Summary

This chapter provided an opportunity to discuss the findings by placing them in the context of existing research. Interpretation of this study's findings led to the identification of

numerous areas for practical application. Methods for dissemination of these findings were presented along with a list of specific groups who might benefit from them. An articulation of suggestions for specific action accompanied a discussion of the implications of the findings for social change. This was followed by a consideration of limitations to the study and recommendations for further study. Finally, the chapter concluded by revisiting my experience as the researcher and presenting a creative synthesis that portrayed this experience.

Final Summary

The first chapter of this study provided background on the topic of how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in the wake of their suffering and highlighted the gap in the existing body of research and the need to understand how meaning and purpose is experienced among adult Iraqi refugees. Viktor Frankl's (1946/2006) and Park and Ai's (2006) models of meaning were presented as they are useful for understanding how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning in their suffering. I detailed my personal interest in the topic and explained the rationale behind the selection of a qualitative phenomenological research approach (Moustakas, 1990). Specific research questions were articulated, and both assumptions and limitations of the research approach were acknowledged. Chapter Two presented a review of relevant literature that focused on meaning making among veterans, Holocaust survivors, and refugees. This review served to ground the present study in the existing literature while at the same time identifying important gaps in the literature that this study would address. The third chapter provided a description of the research design, detailing processes for participant selection and outlining procedures for data collection and analysis. Along with ethical considerations, issues related to validity and trustworthiness were addressed. The fourth chapter provided demographic information on the three participants and summarized findings that were associated

with each of the eight research questions. Primary themes and subthemes were identified and supported by inclusion of quotes and narratives from the study participants. Finally, Chapter Five provided a discussion of the findings and their implications for a number of specific populations. Overall, this research project has been successful in providing understanding of how adult Iraqi refugees experience meaning and purpose in life in the wake of their suffering. The information presented by the participants is rich and gives insight into the experience of meaning and purpose during times of suffering. It also holds the potential to facilitate the development of treatments that incorporate aspects of meaning to allow for more in-depth practices that empower survivors and allow for new discoveries of positive outcomes of suffering.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Study name: The experience of meaning and purpose in life among adult Iraqi refugees in Jordan: A qualitative phenomenological study.

Researcher: Reem I. Abbasi, Ph.D. Candidate, Professional Counseling Program, Liberty University.



You are invited to be in a research study about the experience of meaning and purpose in life in the wake of suffering. You were selected as a possible participant because you have completed therapy at Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) and you might be able to answer the research question. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this research is to understand your experience of meaning and purpose in life in the wake of suffering. This qualitative study will explore your experience of the phenomenon of meaning and purpose in life in the face of suffering. The primary research question framing this study is: How do adult Iraqi refugees who survived war trauma make meaning and find purpose in life in their suffering?

What you will be asked to do in the research: You will be asked to complete a form of demographic data about yourself that takes about 15 minutes. You will be asked to meet with the researcher in a place that feels safe for you for an interview that will last from one to two hours. The researcher will pay the cost of your transportation. During this interview you will be asked a number of questions. The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed. I will ask you to review the transcripts of your interview content in order to ensure that your experiences have been accurately understood. You will be given an opportunity to respond, correct, and add any information you wish to. The results of this study will be shared with you to ensure content validity.

Benefits and risks of the research: This study will provide rich descriptions of the experiences of adult Iraqi refugees who agreed to participate in this study and were able to answer the research questions designed to understand the experience of meaning making and purpose in life in the wake of suffering. With an increased understanding of how meaning and hope can still be experienced among trauma survivors, clinicians working in the field of trauma therapy may better support trauma survivors throughout their healing journey by addressing oft-overlooked inner resources related to the inner being and spirit. In addition, learning about these experiences will shed light on areas that readers, academics, and policymakers will benefit from as they seek to develop comprehensive refugee policies and programs. The risks involved in this study are minimal and include that you might become emotionally overwhelmed as you share your traumatic experience. Since the researcher who will interview you is a psychotherapist, the researcher will be able to support you if you become emotionally stressed. In addition, if you find you need additional psychotherapy support, the researcher will provide you with psychotherapists' names outside of CVT so you can choose one of them to be referred to and have the cost of session covered by the researcher.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the research is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating at any time and at any phase. If you choose not to participate or you choose not to answer any of the research questions, this will not influence your relationship with CVT, the researcher, or Liberty University, now or in the future. If you choose to withdraw from the study, call me using the phone number listed below and feel free to explain the reasons if you wish to. Any obtained data will be destroyed in this situation.

Confidentiality: The researcher has a primary responsibility to safeguard all collected data and to store it in secured locked cabinets. Your identification will remain confidential and will be replaced by using a code. All written notes, verbal conversations, tape recordings will be kept confidential, and only the researcher can access it. All materials will be transferred in a locked container and stored in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet. Data stored on my computer will be secured with passwords. Please note that the researcher will use all secured data in writing up the results of this study and is subject to publication. Records will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

Questions about the research: If you have questions about the research in general or your role in the study, please feel free to contact me or my faculty advisor.

Researcher:

Reem I. Abbasi [REDACTED]

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Lisa S. Sosin [REDACTED]

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to tape record me as part of my participation in this study.

Consent: I consent to participate in: The experience of meaning and purpose in life among adult Iraqi refugees in Jordan: A qualitative phenomenological study conducted by Reem I. Abbasi, Ph.D. candidate. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
(Participant)

Signature: _____ Date: _____
(Researcher)

Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. Please share as much as you feel comfortable with about your experience as an Iraqi refugee during the 2003 Iraq War.
2. How did you feel and cope at that time?
3. What kept you going?
4. How did you manage to survive?
5. What feelings do you have now when you think about your past experience?
6. What, if anything, positive emerged from your experience with suffering?
7. How, if at all, do you experience meaning and hope in the wake of your suffering?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

1. Please select a pseudonym that you would like to use for this study: _____
2. Age: _____.
3. Gender:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
4. Educational Level: _____
5. Year of Arrival in Jordan: _____
6. How would you describe your religious affiliation (if any)?
 - No religious affiliation
 - Muslim
 - Christian
 - Sabian
 - Other (please specify)_____
7. Current Marital Status:
 - Single
 - Married
 - Widowed
 - Divorced
 - Separated
8. Number of Children (if any): _____

Appendix D: Initial Contact Procedures with Potential Participants

1. I will randomly select potential participants from the list by drawing numbers which will have been assigned to each individual. Those who are selected from the list will be contacted by phone.
2. I will call only three potential participants per day. When I call each potential participant, I will introduce myself using the following script: “My name is Reem Abbasi and I work at CVT as a psychotherapist trainer. I am also a PhD candidate at Liberty University, and I am working on a research project for my program. My research project is not part of CVT services. I have obtained your name from CVT data because you have completed individual or group therapy and you completed your six-month follow-up assessment and expressed that you might be interested in participating in research.”
3. I will give a brief overview of the study including its purpose, its procedures, and the risks and benefits of participation. I will tell each potential participant that I have designed this study because I am interested in hearing from adult Iraqi refugees at CVT about how they experience meaning and purpose in their life during their times of suffering. I will tell them that I will ask them to share their past experiences and what happened to them back in Iraq. I will inform them that this will involve a one-time interview that will take one to two hours.
4. I will use the following script after giving this information: “If you need more time to decide whether or not you would like to participate, please take your time to think about it. I will call you tomorrow at the same time if this time works for you so you can let me know if you are interested or not. Please note that if you are not interested, I totally respect your decision and it will not affect your relationship with CVT or your right to access CVT services.” I

will thank each person for his or her time and for listening. I will call the potential participants back on the second day rather than having them call me back for several reasons:

- a. Culturally, it is more acceptable for me to make the follow-up call and shows more respect for them since I need them and not the opposite,
 - b. many of the clients lack the money even to make phone calls, and
 - c. in my experience, the potential participants might forget to call back.
5. If the potential participant expresses interest in hearing more about participating in the project, I will further explain the purpose of the study. I will say, “Do you have about ten minutes now so I can explain the purpose of the study, or do you prefer that I call you another time?” If he or she prefers another time, I will ask for his or her preference.
6. I will say that I have designed this study because I am interested to hear from Adult Iraqi refugees at CVT how they experience meaning and purpose in their life during their times of suffering. I will also ask you to share with me about your past experience and what has happened with you back in Iraq. This will involve a one-off interview that will take about one to two hours
7. I will invite the potential participant to ask any questions he or she may have. I will ask, “Do you have any concerns talking about your past experiences?” If they mention that they have concerns about sharing their experience, I will say, “Would you like to share with me what is worrying you the most?” In the case that potential participants express concern about sharing their experiences, I will thank them for sharing their concerns and for their time, and I will say I respect their choice to not participate in the study. I will reassure them that their decision not to participate will not affect their relationship with CVT. If the participant shares or displays any concerning symptoms that indicate relapse during the initial contacts

on the phone (e.g., psychological symptoms getting worse or affecting their level of functioning, putting themselves or others at risk, or having suicidal thoughts or attempts), I will coordinate with the therapist who is following up with him or her and I will inform the potential participant that I will be doing so and that I will refer them back to the appropriate service with CVT. In case a potential participant expresses interest in participating regardless of what they are experiencing, I will say, “Participation requires you to share about your past experience in Iraq, and this may put you at risk and may increase your level of stress. Are you still interested?” If they continue to show interest in participating, I will respect their decision to participate in the study and I will refer them to an external therapist if needed.

8. If the potential participant shows interest, I will proceed and share with them the following steps:
 - a. I will inform the potential participant of the logistics of participating using the following script: “I will set a date and time to meet with you in an office at a local non-profit company called Arab World for Family Management that is located in Marj Al-hamam-Amman. This means that I will contact you again to agree on the date and time we will be meeting. I will send you a taxi that is safe to bring you from your location to the office where we will meet, and I will arrange for a taxi to bring you back home. Feel free to bring a family member or a friend to accompany you if this makes you feel safer. During the time of your interview, the person you will bring with you will be waiting in another room on the same flat and will be provided snacks and soft drinks. At the time of your interview, I will ask you to sign a consent form, and I will explain the purpose of the study and the procedures of the study in detail.”

- b. I will explain the risks and benefits using the following script: "There will be no direct benefit for you. Sharing about your trauma might cause you to experience a level of emotional distress as you remember your past experiences. If you feel emotionally distressed, I may be able to help you to calm down, and if you need further support, I will refer you to a specialized psychotherapist. You will not have to worry about the expenses of psychotherapy, including your transportation, as I will be covering the expenses at this stage and not CVT.
9. If the potential participants agree to be part of the study, I will thank them and ask to call me if they have any further questions before I call them to agree on the date and time for the interview. I will continue using the same process until I have three individuals who have agreed to participate.