

# Refugees, Family Dynamics, and Resilience: Integrating Systemic Disruptions and Individual Coping Mechanisms

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## Abstract

Migration reshapes family dynamics, emotional well-being, and identity negotiation, disrupting caregiving structures, communication patterns, and intergenerational relationships. This study examines how refugees and their families navigate these systemic disruptions and employ coping mechanisms to foster resilience. Drawing on Family Systems Theory and Stress and Coping Theory, this research integrates macro- and micro-level perspectives to analyze migration as both a structural force affecting family units and an individual psychological challenge. Using a qualitative approach, the findings reveal how physical separation, caregiving reconfigurations, and intergenerational tensions redefine familial roles and emotional bonds. Refugees employ cultural frame switching, bilingual adaptation, and identity negotiation strategies to balance heritage preservation with host culture integration. Community support networks and emotional resilience emerge as critical factors

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in mitigating migration-induced stress. This study extends traditional models such as Berry's acculturation framework and transnational family theories by emphasizing the interplay between systemic family disruptions and personal adaptation processes. The findings contribute to family research by bridging systemic and individual responses, offering policy implications for expediting family reunification, developing culturally responsive mental health services, and designing intergenerational integration programs. This study underscores the need for holistic, family-centered migration policies and support systems to enhance refugee family well-being and long-term resilience.

### **Keywords**

migration and family dynamics, acculturation and adaptation, intergenerational conflict and identity, resilience and coping, transnational family relations

## **Introduction**

Migration research has expanded significantly in recent decades, focusing on economic integration, individual adaptation, and policy development. However, much of this scholarship has overlooked the family as a crucial unit of analysis in shaping migration experiences and outcomes (Walsh, 2016; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Migration disrupts familial structures, leading to fragmented caregiving roles, altered communication patterns, and intergenerational tensions that influence systemic and individual well-being (Berckmoes & Mazzucato, 2018; Peth & Sakdapolrak, 2020). These disruptions are not only logistical but also deeply psychological, imposing emotional burdens on family members and testing the resilience of familial systems (Serra Mingot, 2020).

Traditional acculturation models, such as Berry's (1997, 2021) framework, emphasize individual level adaptation processes while neglecting the mediating role of family systems in these experiences. Similarly, transnational family theories primarily examine caregiving and economic exchanges but do not fully address the emotional and psychological labor required to maintain cohesion across borders (Baldassar & Merla, 2013; Carling et al., 2012). A more comprehensive framework is needed to analyze migration as both a systemic disruptor and a psychological challenge, emphasizing how families adapt to external pressures while individuals negotiate identity and resilience within these disrupted systems (Henry et al., 2015; Vos et al., 2021).

To address these gaps, this study integrates Family Systems Theory and Stress and Coping Theory to provide a multidimensional perspective on

migration's impact. Family Systems Theory offers a macro-level lens to understand how migration restructures familial roles and relationships, highlighting the adaptive capacity of families facing external pressures (Carter & McGoldrick, 2015; Walsh, 2016). Stress and Coping Theory complements this by providing a micro-level view of individual responses to migration-induced stress, illustrating how coping strategies facilitate resilience (Folkman, 2008; Hobfoll et al., 2018). By synthesizing these perspectives, this study bridges systemic and individual analyses, offering a more nuanced understanding of migration's impact on family dynamics and personal adaptation.

This study has two primary objectives. First, it examines the systemic consequences of migration on family dynamics, specifically how caregiving roles, communication patterns, and intergenerational relationships are renegotiated due to migration-induced disruptions. Previous research suggests that migration reshapes family structures, influencing relational hierarchies, caregiving responsibilities, and attachment processes (Berckmoes & Mazzucato, 2018; Walsh, 2016). By detailing these shifts, this study deepens the understanding of migration's impact on family systems and transnational networks. Second, the study explores how families negotiate these disruptions through resilience-building strategies and identity negotiation processes. Migration often requires balancing cultural heritage preservation with adaptation to new social and cultural environments (Ciarabella et al., 2022; Hobfoll et al., 2018). This research investigates how family members leverage community resources, cultural practices, and emotional resilience to navigate psychological challenges and maintain intergenerational identity. These objectives provide a holistic perspective on migration's dual impact on systemic family structures and individual coping mechanisms.

Integrating Family Systems Theory and Stress and Coping Theory is essential for addressing these objectives. Family Systems Theory contextualizes migration as a structural force that disrupts family cohesion, requiring the adaptive restructuring of caregiving and relational hierarchies (Carter & McGoldrick, 2015; Walsh, 2016). Stress and Coping Theory complements this approach by elucidating individuals' psychological strategies to manage these disruptions, including problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms (Folkman, 2008; Hobfoll et al., 2018). By linking systemic disruptions with individual adaptation strategies, this study advances migration research by demonstrating the interdependence of family transformations and resilience-building processes.

This manuscript is structured to systematically analyze the effects of migration on families. The introduction situates the study within broader migration literature, identifies key research gaps, outlines its objectives, and

introduces its theoretical framework. The literature review synthesizes existing research on family dynamics, identity negotiation, and coping mechanisms, identifying limitations in current models and positioning this study's contributions. The methodology section details the qualitative longitudinal research design, participant selection criteria, and data collection and analysis procedures. The findings and analysis section presents key themes, including systemic disruptions to family dynamics, identity negotiation processes, and the reconfiguration of familial aspirations in the migration context. The discussion contextualizes these findings within existing literature, emphasizing their theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the study's contributions to migration research and provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, advocating for family-centered approaches in migration studies and policy interventions.

## **Literature Review**

Interest in the nexus of migration, family dynamics, identity negotiation, and coping mechanisms has increased as researchers recognize the complex ways migration impacts refugees and their families. This section reviews the relevant literature in three primary areas: family dynamics, identity negotiation, and coping mechanisms. It also discusses the theoretical gaps and introduces an integrated framework based on Family Systems Theory and Stress and Coping Theory.

### ***Migration and Family Dynamics***

Migration significantly disrupts traditional family roles and caregiving structures. Research has shown that migration alters intergenerational relationships, causing shifts in family roles (Ayika et al., 2018; Bordone & de Valk, 2016). Prolonged separation due to migration often leads to disrupted communication, making cohesion attempts problematic. Zentgraf and Chinchilla (2012) emphasize the psychological and emotional burdens that arise from these separations.

Family Systems Theory views families as interdependent and interconnected systems where changes to one member affect the entire family dynamic (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1985). Migration disrupts familial structures, requiring reorganizing caregiving roles, communication patterns, and emotional bonds. For instance, Walsh (2016) note that migration leads to shifts in authority, decision-making, and relational hierarchies. These changes are both logistical and highly emotional, as the absence of one or more family members upsets the system's cohesion.

The fragmentation of caregiving roles creates stress and places additional responsibilities on remaining family members, such as single parents or elder caregivers (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013; Patterson, 2002). Families that maintain emotional bonds and reconfigure roles effectively can enhance their resilience and mitigate the adverse effects of migration-induced disruptions (Boss, 2006; Patterson, 2002). Engaging in collaborative problem-solving and emotional support strengthens systemic cohesion, even under strain (Carter & McGoldrick, 2015; Walsh, 2016).

### *Identity Negotiation in Migration*

Identity negotiation is a critical aspect of how migrants navigate bicultural contexts. Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2002) argue that cultural integration is a dynamic interplay between retaining and adapting cultural frameworks. Refugees must exert significant emotional labor to maintain dual identities.

Berry's acculturation model (1997) has been foundational in understanding how refugees adapt to new cultural environments. His framework emphasizes integration—maintaining one's original culture while actively participating in the host culture—as the most adaptive acculturation strategy. This approach allows refugees to develop a bicultural identity, facilitating better psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Berry (2021) has extended his model to examine intergenerational tensions within migrant families. He finds that parents and children often adopt diverse cultural strategies, leading to conflicts in values, practices, and identity formation. These findings highlight the affective complexity of identity negotiation in migration, where acculturation must be balanced with the desire to preserve one's heritage.

Recent studies have expanded on this concept. Research indicates that individuals with high bicultural identity integration, who perceive their cultural identities as compatible, experience better psychological adjustment and well-being (Chen et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2017). Conversely, those with low bicultural identity integration often struggle with internal conflict and stress, making adaptation more challenging.

Another crucial element in identity negotiation is cultural frame switching, where bicultural individuals alternate between cultural frameworks in response to environmental cues. This ability allows refugees to navigate social contexts more fluidly, adapting their behavior to align with cultural expectations (Ward et al., 2018; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Refugees proficient in cultural frame switching are more adaptable and experience lower acculturative stress.

Language proficiency plays a significant role in identity negotiation. Research suggests bilingualism facilitates cultural frame switching, enabling

individuals to adjust their behaviors and attitudes according to the cultural context. This linguistic flexibility contributes to more effective identity negotiation and integration within the host culture (Chen et al., 2014).

In summary, successful negotiation among refugees involves achieving a harmonious bicultural identity, developing the ability to switch cultural frames as needed, and attaining proficiency in the host culture's language. These factors collectively enhance psychological well-being and facilitate smoother integration into the new cultural environment.

### *Coping Mechanisms Among Refugees*

Refugees employ various coping strategies to mitigate displacement and adaptation challenges. According to Hobfoll et al. (2018) and Böhme and Schmitz (2022), resource-based and emotional resiliency strategies are crucial in mitigating migration-induced stress. Refugees access community support networks, utilize cultural resources, and develop emotional resilience to navigate uncertainties.

Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides a framework for understanding the psychological and emotional challenges refugees face. Migration is inherently stressful, involving uncertainty, loss, adaptation, and separation from loved ones (Berry, 1997; Folkman, 2008). The theory identifies two primary coping strategies: problem-focused coping, which addresses external challenges, and emotion-focused coping, which manages emotional responses to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Problem-focused strategies are essential for refugees who must address logistical challenges such as employment, language acquisition, and legal status. These strategies contribute to long-term adaptation and stability (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, involves maintaining hope, seeking emotional support, and reframing challenges as growth opportunities (Folkman, 2008). Many refugees use cultural and religious traditions as coping mechanisms (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Ungar, 2011), providing immediate emotional relief and supporting long-term adaptation.

External resources, such as community networks and institutional support systems, also play a vital role in alleviating refugee stress. Access to supportive networks enhances refugees' ability to navigate challenges, reduces isolation, and fosters resilience (Hobfoll, 1989; Ungar, 2011). These support systems help refugees balance immediate stressors with long-term aspirations (Berry, 1997; Folkman, 2008).

## *Theoretical Gaps and Integrated Framework*

Despite the extensive research on migration, gaps remain in understanding how migration intersects with family dynamics and coping mechanisms. Berry's acculturation model has been foundational but is individualistic, focusing on personal adaptation rather than systemic family disruptions (Berry, 2021). Similarly, transnational family theories emphasize economic and caregiving dimensions but often overlook the psychological and emotional burdens of family separation (Sampaio & Carvalho, 2022). These frameworks treat families as reactive units rather than dynamic systems undergoing internal transformation.

Stress and coping theories offer robust tools for analyzing individual resilience. However, they lack integration with systemic perspectives and fail to account for how family dynamics shape individual coping mechanisms (Hobfoll et al., 2018). To address these gaps, this study integrates Family Systems Theory and Stress and Coping Theory to provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing migration's impact on families.

Family Systems Theory offers a macro-level perspective on systemic disruptions in family roles, communication patterns, and cohesion across geographic and cultural boundaries. This theory underscores the interdependence of family members and how systemic changes influence individual well-being and collective adaptation (Albertini et al., 2019; Bámaca-Colbert et al., 2019). At the micro-level, stress and coping theory focuses on psychological and emotional reactions to disrupted family systems. Resource-based strategies, emotional resilience, and community and cultural support all help mitigate displacement and integration challenges (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Integrating Family Systems and Stress and Coping Theories provides a multidimensional framework for analyzing migration's effects on families. Family Systems Theory highlights systemic disruptions such as caregiving fragmentation and shifting family roles (Bowen, 1978; Walsh, 2016). Stress and Coping Theory examines individuals' psychological strategies to manage these changes (Berry, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This dual perspective acknowledges that systemic changes and individual responses are interdependent. For example, changes in family structures often induce stress, which requires individual coping strategies such as emotional resilience and community support (Folkman, 2008; Patterson, 2002). By linking systemic disruptions with individual adaptation processes, this approach provides a holistic understanding of migration's challenges and coping mechanisms (Ungar, 2011; Walsh, 2016).

Beyond theoretical contributions, this integrated framework has practical implications for policy and intervention strategies. Policies focused on family

reunification and culturally sensitive mental health services can minimize systemic disruptions while fostering resilience (Berry, 2006; Hobfoll, 2018). By addressing both systemic and emotional needs, such interventions can help refugee families navigate the complexities of displacement and adaptation. This study fills a gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive, multidimensional framework that connects systemic and individual perspectives on migration's impact on families. It offers theoretical advancements and practical insights into developing effective support systems for refugee families.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative longitudinal design to examine the lived experiences of refugees throughout four critical phases: pre-immigration, travel, settlement, and integration. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of the evolving challenges and coping mechanisms employed by refugees as they navigated displacement and adaptation. Qualitative research was selected due to its ability to uncover the nuanced, context-driven aspects of human behavior, aligning with the recommendations of [Creswell and Poth \(2016\)](#).

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, ensuring that individuals with relevant experiences were included to provide rich insights into the impact of forced migration on professional, social, and psychological well-being. This strategy mirrors best practices in qualitative research, as outlined by [Lincoln and Guba \(1985\)](#), allowing for a deep engagement with participants' subjective realities and the identification of themes across their migration trajectories.

## ***Participants and Sampling***

The participants of this study are highly skilled individuals who were purged by government decree following the July 15, 2016, coup attempt in Turkey. Their inability to find employment in Turkey, financial strain, rejection and exclusion by society, and criminal investigations forced them to seek asylum and refugee status in Germany. These individuals meet the [United Nations \(1951\)](#) formal definition of refugees, as they belong to a "specific social group or political opinion" and fear unfair and disproportionate treatment if they return to their home country.

Participants were recruited using a purposeful sampling approach, supplemented by snowball (tracer) sampling to identify others with similar experiences. Initial participants were contacted through the researchers'

professional and personal networks and were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives and ethical safeguards. These initial contacts referred additional participants who met the inclusion criteria, ensuring a diverse yet relevant sample (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

The final sample consisted of 20 male participants aged between 27 and 58, all of whom were highly qualified professionals before their displacement. All the participants are university graduates, five of them holding Ph.Ds. They were coming diverse occupations such as lawyers, academics, medical doctors, teachers, accountants, and ex-government officials. Participants were interviewed 2 years after their arrival in Germany, allowing for a longitudinal perspective that captured the unfolding of their challenges, adaptation strategies, and lived experiences over time. This approach enriched the depth and richness of the data, offering valuable insights into how skilled refugees navigate forced migration, professional loss, and identity reconstruction in a host country.

### *Data Collection*

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol developed based on existing literature and refined through three pilot interviews. The pilot phase allowed for adjustments to improve the clarity and relevance of the questions. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the corresponding authors' previous university before initiating data collection. The final interview guide included both demographic questions (e.g., age, profession, education, and legal status) and open-ended questions addressing:

- Challenges encountered during the settlement process.
- Settlement, adjustment, and integration experiences in Germany, focusing on individual, family, and social adjustments.

All interviews were conducted virtually or via phone, recorded with participant consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Human Ethics and Consent to Participate declarations collected from all participants. This approach ensured a consistent and systematic collection of detailed, narrative-rich data.

### *Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis informed data analysis by applying qualitative content analysis methodologies proposed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Holsti (1969). Researchers independently coded interview transcripts for emerging

themes, comparing, and reconciling them to ensure reliability and coherence in the findings. The finalized coding scheme was then systematically applied across the dataset to identify patterns and themes. Thus, the findings were enhanced in credibility through member checking. Three participants were randomly selected, and the analysis results were presented for verification. All three reported that the analysis represented their experiences, supporting the validity of the findings.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and confidentiality of participants. All individuals were fully informed about the study's objectives, their rights to confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw from participation at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. The research followed international ethical standards for working with vulnerable populations, ensuring the responsible and respectful treatment of participants. To further safeguard confidentiality, all participant identities were anonymized, and data was securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

## **Findings**

### ***Cluster 1: Family Dynamics and Emotional Impact***

The migration experiences of participants have reshaped family dynamics imbued with consequential emotional burdens yet, at the same time, sources of resiliency and adaptation. Separation, or more specifically, the physical distance fracturing and creating enduring voids in familial bonds, lies at the heart of participant narratives concerning migration. Another push/pull driver for migration, linked to safety concerns, is how participants discuss ways of protecting the immediate family while worrying about their left-behind family. Added to this were emotional burdens like guilt and inadequacy as participants came to reconcile their roles within reshaped familial systems. Lastly, raising children in a new cultural context—the intergenerational identity negotiation that presented an ongoing challenge for those with children in balancing between preserving cultural heritage and fostering adaptability for their children. These subthemes reveal how emotional well-being, identity, and family relationships are interlaced within the migration experience.

*Separation and Distance.* Separation became a defining feature of migration that appealed to the participants' emotional lives. This physical separation torn

asunder the cohesion of the family unit and inculcated the lasting effect of fragmentation. As Participant 1 explained poignantly, “My family is fragmented; everybody is in different places. Sometimes, it seems we always connect and never quite make it.” This incompleteness resonated throughout the narratives, where separation fractured practical caregiving roles and emotional bonds.

Some participants extended the separations to include long separations of missing momentous events. Participant 2 described it as: “In this process, we were separated from our daughter for two continuous years. Every day was like a lifetime.” These long-term divisions stressed family relationships and created emotional gaps that were often difficult to bridge once reunited. One source of repeated distress was being unable to give immediate support to the members. Participant 11 reflected, “I am far from my parents, and when they need help, I cannot be there. This helplessness crushes me.”

Children were not an exception to these confusions and mostly suffered from psychological challenges due to the separation. Children were not excluded from the confusion; indeed, “The distance is affecting our children’s psychological state as well. They are too young to understand why this is happening,” as Participant 8 referred. This quotation shows how these effects of separation went over to younger generations.

Hope was a fundamental coping mechanism against these challenges. Participant 19 said, “The hope of reuniting with them keeps me alive. It is the only thing that keeps me moving forward.” These narratives highlight the double nature of separation: while it caused profound pain, it also created resilience and a continued belief in eventual reunion.

*Concern for Family Safety.* Safety concerns were among the participants’ most potent reasons for migration, especially when they had children. According to Participant 1, “The mortal danger for our children obliged us to leave. We could not stay anymore.” This urgency reflects how participants framed migration not as a choice but as a need that came with their survival.

However, safety-related fears did not disappear after migration, particularly regarding family members who stayed behind. As noted by Participant 6, “The safety of my family left in Turkey is always on my mind. I cannot get it out of my head.” This dual focus of protecting the immediate family while still being concerned for the ones left behind created one continuous emotional drain. As stated by Participant 15: “Every decision I made felt like it was taken to protect them, but it exhausted me. Just a constant.”

Safety also intersected with participants’ aspirations for their children and the building of a future. Participant 8 stated, “It was important for me that my children grow up in a democratic country where they could be free.” In most

instances, migration was framed as a generational investment in building a secure safety foundation and opportunities for their children.

These narratives illustrate the paradox of safety in migration. While relocation resolved the immediate threats, it created new vulnerabilities, particularly concerning family members left behind. Participant 19 said, "I want them to feel safer here. It is my responsibility to ensure that they can live without fear." The findings reveal how safety is an ongoing process rather than a one-time achievement, requiring emotional and practical labor.

*Emotional Burden on Relationships.* Migration reshaped participants' relationships, introducing emotional burdens that tested familial bonds. There is a feeling of guilt; the pang kept echoing since the participants struggled to align their decisions for migration with those of cultural and family expectations. Participant 2 explained, "I feel so guilty because of my family situation; I have felt I am failing them somehow, yet deep inside, I know I had never had another choice." It depicts the psychological consequences of working out responsibility in fragmented family systems.

Communication gaps further complicate these dynamics, leading to emotional estrangements. Participant 9 explained, "Even contacting my family left behind is very difficult. It feels like a wall between us." This feeling of disconnection was strongest among participants who could not maintain regular contact with their loved ones due to safety concerns or logistical barriers. Participant 13 also said, "My friends are in Turkey, and I could not contact them for security reasons. This is a kind of forcing into isolation."

Despite these, growth and reflective moments arose from these emotional burdens. Participant 18 reflected, "The fragmentation of my family has taken a toll on my mental health. It is hard to focus on anything else." However, resilience became a recurring theme as participants described how these experiences fostered self-awareness and emotional strength. Participant 19 shared, "The hope of meeting them again keeps me going. It gives me strength to survive." These narratives bring forth complicated ways in which feelings of guilt and loss interact to keep family relationships intact during migration.

*Intergenerational Identity Negotiation.* In addition, bringing up children in a new cultural context meant participants had a double role: keeping their cultural heritage alive but, at the same time, preparing their children to be able to function in the host society. Participant 12 stated, "I want to teach my children my own and German cultures. At the same time, I want them to fit in here and be successful." This juggling underlines the emotional labor involved in fostering dual identities that pay respect to both origins and opportunities. This

type of preservation often became a family-wide project, usually reinforced through rituals and tradition. As Participant 15 explained, “Special days like holidays try to keep the tradition alive. It is something small, but it means a lot to all of us.” Anchoring in this way created continuity in change.

However, tensions also arose when children accepted the norms of the host culture more quickly than their parents. Participant 16 reports, “I am trying to ensure my kids do not feel stuck between two identities. It is a thin line we have to balance every day.” These tensions were often extra reflecting points for participants regarding themselves and the values they tried to pass on to others. As P19 explained, “We must help them balance the old and the new. I want them to preserve their identity, but we must also ensure they balance it with modern culture.”

These narratives also highlight participants’ resilience and creativity in negotiating intergenerational dynamics. These findings signal the emotional and cultural labor invested in raising their children’s sense of belonging and adaptability, bridging the gap between heritage and integration.

## *Cluster 2: Outlook and Aspirations*

Participants’ future aspirations demonstrated a dynamic interplay between hope, pragmatism, and emotional complexity. Long-term settlement in the host country became a need and an ambition simultaneously, while legal security, the future of children, and professional opportunities proved to be powerful drivers. Meanwhile, participants reported not being sure of returning to their country of origin; thus, tension existed between an emotional attachment to one’s roots and the pragmatic advantages of staying in the host society. Central in their hopes was the ideal of a superior life for their children, and often, this became the foundation of their migration narrative. These, too, struggled to retain the notion of cultural identity in the new societal fit and looked to gain a sense of belonging without losing personal authenticity. Interwoven and layered is the nature of refugees’ aspirations: the emotional labor they invest in shaping their futures.

*Plans for Long-Term Stay.* Participants frequently described their plans for long-term settlement as practical and emotional fulfillment. Legal security through citizenship or permanent residency was important to creating stability and a sense of belonging. Participant 1 said, “After getting citizenship, I will settle here permanently,” reflecting that legal status provides physical security and emotional reassurance. Participant 13 said, “I am going to bring my whole family here,” reflecting the centrality of family reunification within their long-term aspirations.

The decision to stay was usually linked to providing their children the chance for a better future. "I want my children to have a good education here," Participant 6 said, with education as an important determinant. The host country, meanwhile, is seen both as a personal and a professional starting over. Participant 7 said, "I intend to start my life anew in this country," illustrating his agency and optimism given the hardships accompanying the decision to emigrate.

Some of the identified key barriers included language and professional integration. As evidenced in the quote, "After learning the language, I would want to stay here more," Participant 9 illustrated how the language was an obstacle and an enabler of their long-term goals. These testimonies expose a complex interplay of hope, practicality, and persistence in shaping participants' aspirations for permanence in the host country.

*Uncertainty About Returning.* Most participants reported ambivalence toward returning to their home country, as there was a tension between emotional attachment and practical realities. In fact, for many of them, the possibility to return was conditional and depended on the political or social turmoil in their country. Participant 1 shared, "If the conditions improve, I want to return to my country." Hereby, he conditioned his longing for home with positive external factors. Participant 18 shared, "If the system in Turkey improves, I would consider returning." Again, in his thoughts, the possibility of return was linked with systemic reform.

For others, the idea of return felt increasingly far removed. Participant 10 reported, "Returning seems like a very remote possibility," illustrating exactly how time and circumstance had lessened their contact with their homeland. Participants related that resettling in the host country came with new attachments and dependencies, making leaving quite impracticable. For example, Participant 15 expressed, "We have built a life here; going back feels almost like a dream," which best described how rebuilding abroad reinvented the sense of home.

This ambivalence also frequently intersects with participants' aspirations for their children. In most instances, they view the host country as granting more stability and opportunities, often overriding the emotional pull of returning to their homeland. These narratives detail both sides of refugees' experiences: the tension between longing for home and embracing new opportunities informs their view of the future.

*Aspirations for Children.* The personal migration narrative and long-term goals stated by participants concern the well-being and futures of children. This is a sacrifice for the children's success is how often participants framed their

migration: Participant 2, “We came here so that they could grow up in a democratic country,” wished to give them a milieu devoid of political and social upheavals that their country is plagued with.

They also wanted to see their children grow strong and survive in the dual cultural contexts they had been living in. Participant 7 expressed, “I believe they will have more opportunities here,” reflecting a belief in the potential of the host country to give them a better future. At the same time, participants described difficulties related to their children’s preservation of their heritage and the stimulation of their children’s integration. Participant 15 shared, “I want my children to succeed in the modern world without forgetting our culture,” and thus underlined the twin goals of cultural preservation and adaptation to society.

These hopes and expectations were often invested with profound-looking meaning and responsibility. For example, Participant 19 reported, “We are here for them; their future is the reward for our efforts,” showing how participants had invested in their children’s futures through personal sacrifice. In this respect, intergenerational goals framed the core of migration experiences according to participants, underpinning possibilities of transformation associated with succeeding in children’s lives.

*Identity and Aspirations.* A central theme emerging through narratives is the reconciliation between personal identity and society’s expectations. Many participants referred to their goals as a double pursuit of integration and authenticity, a will to hold onto the roots of culture but adjust to the host society. Participant 1 said, “I want to build a future here while preserving my identity,” which depicts how one weighs belonging with the preservation of self.

Participants also highlighted professional and social integration as part of their aspirations. As expressed by Participant 8, “I want to live my own culture while adapting to this one,” shows the subtlety between personal authenticity and societal expectations. For most, professional success, besides being a personal aspiration, was one sure way of giving back to the host community. Participant 18 shared, “I plan to rebuild my career here and contribute to society,” demonstrating how participants’ aspirations went beyond their personal needs into societal contribution.

These narratives illustrate how identity, aspiration, and integration processes are inextricably linked and involve participants navigating challenging emotional and cultural landscapes. Journeys through which participants commit to creating meaningful lives in the host country without losing themselves point toward resilience or adaptability that characterizes the migration experience.

## Discussion

It reflects how migration disrupts the family system and brings about change while highlighting individual and family coping strategies in response to these challenges. The findings are framed within a Family Systems Theory perspective, indicating changes to systemic caregiving patterns, communication, and generational relationships. These disruptions agree with Walsh's previous works 2016 on how migration disrupts familial relationships and creates new hierarchies of relatedness. For instance, some of the lasting systemic strains identified within the study, including fragmented caregiving roles, speak to structural and emotional challenges migration has imposed on families.

At the individual level, insights from Stress and Coping theory illuminate how family members respond to systemic disruptions. Earlier research by Carver et al. (1989) and Hobfoll et al. (2018) demonstrates that migrants rely on emotion-focused coping strategies (such as maintaining hope and reframing challenges) and problem-focused strategies (including resource mobilization and skill acquisition). These findings extend the previous literature by placing individual coping mechanisms within family systems and emphasizing how shared family dynamics promote or impede individual resilience.

The study also enriches our understanding of intergenerational identity negotiation. Consistent with Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2018), migrants in this study emphasized balancing cultural preservation with adaptation, often mediated by parental aspirations for their children. Families actively sought to teach their children cultural heritage while encouraging integration into the host society, demonstrating a dual effort to maintain identity and foster adaptability. These findings extend the work of Berry's acculturation model, 2021, to indicate that cultural adaptation does not stand in a vacuum but is interwoven into systemic family dynamics.

The study further contributes to new insights regarding safety concerns and family resilience. Despite, for example, several studies like Zentgraf and Chinchilla (2012) documenting the psychological impact of family separation, this study underlines collective drive-by safety concerns in migration decisions and systemic dynamics. Safety often serves the unifying purpose among family members, guiding individual coping strategies or collective decision-making. It does so by linking systemic safety concerns with an individual emotional response; thus, the study has addressed the literature gap in demonstrating that family and individual levels of adaptation are indeed interlinked.

These findings confirm the earlier research and add that systemic family dynamics and individual coping mechanisms influence one another

bidirectionally in the context of migration. This approach furthers the research on how migration impacts families and underlines the value of a holistic approach to analyzing migration experiences.

While this study aligns with prior research on family dynamics and identity negotiation in migration, it expands the scope by integrating systemic and individual perspectives. For example, Berry's acculturation model (2021) stresses individual cultural adaptation, while this study highlights how systemic changes at the family level, like redefined caregiving roles and intergenerational tensions, directly impact shaping and influencing individual adaptation strategies. Similarly, theories of the transnational family emphasize economic exchanges and caregiving responsibilities, while often overlooking the psychological and emotional burdens of family separation (Sethi et al., 2022).

The present study integrates Family Systems Theory and fills the gaps by mapping systemic disruptions at a family level in the stated individual resilience strategies. It further shifts the more orthodox approaches to the stress and coping literature by placing individual reactions into the broader family system domains, providing a fuller, enriching framework for understanding the consequences of migration. These findings contribute to the literature on migration by underlining the interdependence of systemic and individual processes, furthering theoretical and practical insights.

The findings show that migration affects family dynamics and coping mechanisms differently in various cultural and geographic contexts. For example, families originating from collectivist societies often maintain strong intergenerational connections and cultural preservation as key strategies of continuity (Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema, 2019; Wali & Renzaho, 2018). In contrast, migrant groups whose background or host-context emphasizes individual independence may adopt coping and adjustment strategies focused on autonomy and integration.

This tension of cultural preservation and adaptation highlighted in the present study can underline how cultural norms and the host society's structure influence migration experiences. For instance, refugees migrating from collective cultures may feel stronger pushes toward maintaining ties with both family and culture. At the same time, an individualistic society presses a refugee on issues related to balancing personal autonomy and responsibility to one's family. These variations thus signal that support systems responsive to the needs of diverse family ecologies created by different migrations are appropriate. Further probing such cross-cultural variations in further research will help deepen the understanding and inform policy development.

This study contributes to the growing literature on migration by combining Family Systems Theory with Stress and Coping Theory, proffering a new

perspective examining migration as a systemic and individual process. The theoretical conceptualization is further extended by relating systemic disruptions to the resilience strategies of these subjects at an individual level, showing their complementarities in capturing the multidimensional impact of migration. Therefore, it lays the groundwork for further research to consider that migration can be one dynamic interaction between family systems and individual psychological processes.

These findings have significant implications for policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve the well-being of refugee families. One crucial aspect is the family reunification policy, where expediting the reunification process can minimize systemic disruptions caused by prolonged separations. Ensuring families remain together fosters emotional stability and strengthens their ability to navigate adaptation challenges. Additionally, culturally sensitive mental health services are essential in addressing both systemic and individual emotional needs. Tailored mental health programs, such as family therapy sessions and resilience-building workshops, can help refugees cope with the psychological strains of displacement while maintaining their family cohesion.

Furthermore, intergenerational integration programs support refugee families as they adapt to new cultural environments. Community-based initiatives, including dual-language education and cultural preservation programs, can help bridge generational gaps, facilitate identity negotiation, and promote societal integration within families. By implementing these targeted strategies, policymakers can enhance the resilience of refugee families, ensuring their successful adaptation and long-term well-being.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

These limitations must be overcome in future research. One methodological failing is that a single geographical and cultural setting reduces generalizability. A comparative investigation into various migration corridors goes a long way toward a more comprehensive understanding of how these cultural and structural variables affect family dynamics and coping strategies. As richly endowed as qualitative insight is, it also demands that the quantitative approach be used with qualitative insight to achieve more excellent extension and applicability.

Longitudinal studies also allow the detection of how migration affects families over time, capturing the changing character of systemic disruptions and individual resilience strategies. Future studies could eventually delve into subgroups of refugee families, undocumented refugees, or expatriates to determine the variability in migration experiences and challenges.

## Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between migration, family dynamics, and resilience by integrating Family Systems Theory and Stress and Coping Theory. The findings highlight how systemic disruptions caused by migration, including fragmented caregiving roles, intergenerational tensions, and shifts in family communication patterns, are managed through resilience-building strategies such as cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and community support networks.

The study underscores that while migration disrupts traditional family structures, it also fosters adaptive mechanisms that enable migrants to navigate these challenges. Identity negotiation emerges as a crucial element in maintaining a balance between cultural preservation and integration, particularly among second-generation migrants. Similarly, emotional resilience and collective coping strategies play a fundamental role in mitigating the stressors of displacement. From a policy perspective, this research calls for expedited family reunification programs, culturally responsive mental health services, and intergenerational integration initiatives to support migrant families in host countries. These findings also offer valuable insights for social workers, educators, and policymakers in designing interventions that address both systemic and individual migration challenges. Future research should explore how different socioeconomic and cultural contexts influence family resilience strategies and examine longitudinal changes in migrant family structures. Further interdisciplinary studies combining qualitative and quantitative methods could deepen our understanding of migration's multifaceted impact on families. By bridging theoretical gaps and offering practical insights, this study advances migration research and emphasizes the need for holistic, family-centered policies that support migrant well-being and successful integration.

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## Ethical Consideration

The study adhered to the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki and institutional research ethics guidelines. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Monash University, the first authors previous institution.

## Consent to Participate

Human Ethics and Informed Consent to Participate declarations collected from all participants and can be shared with request from the corresponding author.

## Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were performed by Erhan Atay and Serkan Bayraktaroglu. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Erhan Atay and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Data Availability Statement

Research Data is available and can be shared on request from the corresponding author. Qualitative Analysis results, participant quotations and themes are submitted as an attachment to the manuscript.

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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