Young people from refugee backgrounds as a resource for disaster risk reduction

Young people from refugee backgrounds represent an important resource for disaster risk reduction within their respective communities. This paper presents a qualitative study with young people from refugee backgrounds and their experiences of the 2010–2011 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand. The interviews and focus group discussions with these participants highlighted their capacities as cultural brokers and mediators, as they ensured that their respective communities had access to disaster related information that was translated and interpreted. Thus, young people from refugee backgrounds represent a bridge that can connect people from their ethnic communities to key disaster information through their linguistic capital, digital literacies and social networks to support the recovery process. As part of the recovery effort, these young people also emphasized the need for more inclusive social and recreational spaces to be able to meaningfully participate in the (re)imagining of the city. This paper discusses how young people from refugee backgrounds can offer leadership within their communities and can play integral roles in disaster risk reduction.

1.1 Introduction

The disaster literature demonstrates that young people have capacities that enable them to actively participate in disaster risk reduction and recovery processes (Mutch, 2013; Peek, 2008; Peek & Stough, 2010). Whilst it is increasingly recognised that young people can improve disaster preparedness and response, a significant gap remains in examining adolescent youth from refugee backgrounds, and the key roles they can play in their own communities. Ingamells and Westoby (2008, p. 165) argue that "young people themselves bring resources, but the expert gaze often misses them." This paper responds to this critique and presents a study that documented refugee background community perspectives of, and responses to, the 2010–2011 Canterbury earthquakes in New Zealand. The most significant earthquake occurred on February 22, 2011 that resulted in 185 deaths and millions of dollars of damage to buildings and key infrastructure, which destroyed much of the Christchurch's central business district. Through the voices of young people themselves (defined as being under 24 years of age), this paper outlines the need for a greater recognition of the supportive and capacity building roles they can assume for disaster risk reduction by highlighting their linguistic capacities, digital literacies and roles as cultural brokers with the wider society.

2.1 Disasters, Diversity and Young People: Vulnerabilities and Capacities

A central consideration in the disaster literature is the interplay of vulnerabilities and capacities. Though at seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum, these two concepts are related, and include the associated material, cultural, social and political considerations that mitigate the ways in which a particular community experiences a disaster.

2.1.1 Vulnerability

Gaillard (2010, p. 219) explains that vulnerability refers to the susceptibility of an individual or community to endure damage from a "potentially dangerous event, either natural, economic or political". In a natural hazard context, relevant considerations of vulnerability depend on an individual's and/or a community's ability (or lack thereof) to foresee, manage and recover from a disaster (Fothergill, Maestas, & Darlington, 1999). Many of these considerations are relative to broader socio-political and economic forces where Donner and Rodrigues (2008) note that people's vulnerabilities are more strongly determined by social class, education, gender, age and language proficiency (amongst others) than the actual disaster itself. Within these wider considerations, young people are often labelled as "vulnerable" as they may be physically weaker than adults, dependent on others for their well-being and decision-making, and uninformed or unfamiliar with preparedness and safety procedures, which limit their contributions to disaster risk reduction (Gaillard & Pangilinan, 2010; Peek, 2008).

In addition, numerous authors maintain that typically marginalised populations such as immigrant and minority groups are generally more vulnerable in disaster situations (Aldrich, 2012; Donner & Rodríguez, 2008; Peacock, Morrow, & Gladwin, 2000; Tierney, 2006). Minority communities tend to be less prepared for a disaster event, have fewer resources for evacuation if needed, and experience inequalities in access to aid and recovery assistance (Eisenman et al., 2007). Communities from refugee backgrounds can represent part of this group where their cultural and linguistic diversity can create additional considerations for effective disaster mitigation.

New Zealand currently accepts 750 refugees on an annual basis as part of its resettlement programme. These people represent a wide range of ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, linguistic diversity and national identities. Whilst it is important to understand that refugees are not inherently vulnerable in disaster contexts, numerous factors (in addition to those previously mentioned) can increase vulnerability for this group. These include previous forced migration experiences, variable linguistic competencies , limited social networks (at least initially) and the need to adapt to new host society norms, customs and laws. In addition, new arrivals to the country will be less familiar with the natural and built environments, and the organizational structures for accessing assistance (Spittles & Fozdar, 2008). Mitchell (2003) emphasizes the importance of involving culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in/with planning and disaster risk reduction initiatives/processes before a major hazard occurs as these events can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

For refugee background communities, language proficiency (most often English in resettlement contexts) is a clear barrier to receiving and accessing the correct information regarding disaster preparedness, mitigation efforts and associated responses. Donner and Rodriguez (2008) explain that a deficit in linguistic capital can lead to misunderstanding hazard warnings, and can create difficulties seeking and applying for relief assistance following the disaster. This 'deficit' is closely related to and impacted by exogenous structural limitations which often assume that people are fluent in the host society language and therefore have access to information and information. Further, refugee and minority groups may maintain different social constructions on values than the wider society and state institutions. For instance, cultural beliefs and attitudes will shape how particular communities view the threat of a potential hazard, and therefore will affect how they prepare for a disaster and whether they take heed of government warnings and advice (Mercer et al., 2012). In the post-disaster context, distinct communities may identify and value different areas in need of attention and recovery efforts. Similarly, previous experiences with disasters and/or aid organisations will affect how communities react to, and welcome, relief aid from authorities (Donner & Rodriguez, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2008). Thus, disaster prevention agencies must develop ongoing relationships and partnerships with CALD/refugee background communities prior to, and during, disaster recovery, as well as integrate and include them in reduction and preparation processes.

2.1.2 Capacities

Whilst vulnerabilities often emerge from exogenous structural limitations and discrepancies, capacities primarily originate from endogenous resources to the community that include local skills, knowledge and solidarity networks (Eiser et al., 2012; Gaillard, 2010). According to Gaillard (2010), the concept of capacities in disaster literature refers to the resources that individuals and communities possess to survive, manage and recover from a disaster event, and crucial to this process is the ability to access and utilize these assets. Communities with proactive disaster mitigation plans are better prepared and able to access assets and cope with emergencies. Vital to risk mitigation is the ability to receive and interpret warning communications, thus individuals and communities must be able to understand the language (and level) of warnings and safety instructions (Eisenman et al., 2007; Eiser et al., 2012). However, information can originate from varying sources, as Fothergill et al.'s (1999) literature review revealed: different ethnic communities received information from diverse sources and networks. For example, Mexican Americans utilized social "informal" networks, receiving information from family and friends who relayed advice based on events experienced in other countries. "White" Americans, on the other hand, were more likely to receive warning and response information from "formal" networks, and in the English language. They also found differences in the perception of credibility of sources (i.e., official sources vs mass media). Therefore, discrepancies

related to reliability and consistency can exist regarding where and how particular communities access hazard warning information.

In relation, young people can make important contributions to disaster risk reduction and recovery efforts in numerous ways. Peek (2008, p. 18) lists children's possible contributions throughout the "disaster lifecycle", and these include: preparedness such as disaster drills, risk mapping and evacuation planning; response such as warning others, risk communication, translation of disaster materials and evacuation assistance; and recovery such as effective coping strategies, aid collection/distribution, and planning and rebuilding efforts. Wachtendorf, Brown, and Nickle (2008) examined three different initiatives undertaken in the United States, ranging from pre-school age to high school, in which young people were educated in preparing for disaster situations, and were seen to "serve as conduits for disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery information dissemination, both among their peers as well as to other household members" (p. 457). The study argued that acknowledging young people's social capabilities in disaster education can promote the resiliency of their communities in disaster situations. Therefore, because young people constitute an effective medium for relaying important disaster awareness and safety measures, they hold an important role in the area of disaster risk reduction (Gaillard & Pangilinan, 2010; Mutch, 2014; Peek, 2008; Peek & Stough, 2010). This situation is especially relevant in cases where parents and family members do not speak the host society's language. Young people from CALD backgrounds may represent the primary or only linguistic link with the host society.

For CALD and refugee background communities, young people can also offer connections to particular resources and social networks beyond their ethnic community. The migration literature typically demonstrates that children adapt to new cultural and linguistic contexts more quickly than their parents. Often, young people are needed to interpret and translate key messages for their family members and intra-ethnic community, and serve as potential cultural brokers with the wider society (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Valtonen, 2008). For instance, Mitchell, Haynes, Hall, Choong, and Oven (2008) presented two case studies showing how young El Salvadorians responding to multiple natural hazards (earthquakes, hurricanes and landslides) and Vietnamese youth reacting to Hurricane Katrina provided valuable roles as mediators between their respective communities and external forms of support. Because young resettled refugees are able to learn a language and a culture relatively quickly, they can become the communication and cultural bridges between their ethnic community and the host society. However, Correa-Velez, Gifford, and Barnett (2010) highlight that in Australia, programmes and policies for resettled refugee youth generally "fail to recognise and build on the considerable resources these youth bring to their new country and miss opportunities to develop their leadership potential" (p. 1399). This paper examines the resources that

young people from refugee backgrounds utilised in responding to the Canterbury earthquakes, and how they made meaningful responses to disaster risk reduction within their communities.

3.1 Context of the Canterbury Earthquakes

The city of Christchurch, based in the Canterbury region of New Zealand experienced four major earthquakes and thousands of aftershocks between 2010 and 2011. The most devastating earthquake occurred on February 22, 2011 and resulted in 185 fatalities and widespread destruction to the central business district and residential areas. This earthquake represents the second-deadliest disaster arising from a natural hazard and the most expensive in New Zealand's history. In 2015 the recovery process continues, with many homes and businesses declared unhabitable, numerous areas yet to be rebuilt, and many individuals, families and communities still waiting for their homes and other major infrastructure to be rebuilt, repaired or developed. Despite these challenges, there are also a number of studies and reports that demonstrate people's networks, internal and external resources and creativity to respond to the earthquakes, which again signals the need to look beyond an exclusive vulnerability paradigm (Cooper-Cabell, 2013; Author, 2013; Sawrey et al., 2011; Thornley et al., 2013; Tudor, 2013).

Before the earthquakes, Christchurch was a primary locality for resettling newly arrived refugees. The refugee background communities resettled and residing in the city at that time included four larger groups (Afghan, Somali, Bhutanese and Ethiopian) and several smaller ones (Eritrean and Kurdish). These groups have been directly impacted by these earthquakes, and it is the young people from these communities who are represented in this paper. Their experiences present the capacities that exist within their respective communities alongside the adversities they faced to outline young people's important role for disaster risk reduction.

3.1.1 Lessons learned from CALD communities and young people

Several reports and studies have now responded to the experiences of CALD groups living in the earthquake-affected city. During the initial recovery phases, leadership and internal support were crucial to these communities' resilience as effective leaders liaised with external organisations, providing their communities with vital information and assistance (Christchurch Migrant Inter-Agency Group [CMI-AG], 2011; Marlowe, 2013; Wylie, 2012). However, some communities did not have this crucial contact/liaison representation, and therefore received minimal-to-no external support following the earthquakes (Osman et al., 2012; Wylie, 2012). Both CMI-AG (2011) and the *Best Practices Guidelines* (Wylie, 2012) signalled the need for health and safety and other official communications provided in simple English and relevant translated languages during the primary

stages of response following the earthquakes. CMI-AG (2011) found that the communications disseminated by the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management were pitched at the literacy levels of 17–18-year-olds; this meant that the approximately 40,000 linguistically diverse community members, in addition to many New Zealand-born citizens with lower literacy rates, were unable to understand and interpret the crucial safety messages. These same two reports also stated that successful, and arguably necessary, working relationships between CALD populations and community agencies were not adequately developed due to the inability to communicate and a lack of cultural sensitivity. A better use of interpreters, and incorporating culturally endorsed liaison people within community agencies were both noted as essential for bridging the response and recovery gaps (Wylie, 2012).

Relating to young people generally, the earthquakes disrupted their daily routines , including: loss of homes; school closures; demolitions; power cuts; and the loss of extra-curricular activities (Mutch, 2013). The Ministry of Youth Development (2010) conducted a consultation with young people following the 2010 earthquake and found that their principal concerns were a return to normality and a stronger sense of community, more information on services for young people, and the need for information concerning how to prepare for future natural hazard situations. Whilst this consultation focussed on young people in general, this paper presents a study that specifically highlights the resilience, language and cultural capacities, and bridging functions that refugee background youth can assume to help inform disaster risk reduction.

4.1 Study Design

This study documented the perspectives and responses of refugee background communities residing in Christchurch to the 2010–2011 earthquakes and subsequent recovery efforts. The participants who inform this paper represent a smaller section of a larger qualitative study of 112 participants (see Author et al., 2014). Young people were defined as individuals between the ages of 12 and 24, inclusive in accordance with the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa definition (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). The data presented in this paper is from seven interviews and one focus group of young university students. All participants had lived in New Zealand at least two years and there was an even representation of male and female participants. Whilst this group cannot be seen to representative of the young people from refugee backgrounds generally, the participants' insights and experiences do suggest the important role that they can play for effective disaster planning and response within their respective communities and in the broader society. Two peer researchers from refugee backgrounds (a Somali male and an Afghan female) were trained to lead the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and to assist with the subsequent analysis (see Author et al., 2014). A third-party approach was utilised for participant recruitment, primarily through the leaders of the

refugee background communities. The interview and focus group questions focussed on how particular individuals and their respective communities responded to the earthquakes, what challenges they faced, their key issues of concern and aspirations looking forward. All interviews and discussions were audio recorded and transcribed, and an initial process of focussed coding was used to identify the main themes and then develop a progressively analytic memo of these, as outlined by Saldaña (2009). The lead researcher and a research assistant reviewed the transcripts to ensure inter-coding agreement and to verify reliability of the identifying and abstracting processes for the codes and themes interpreted. The study received ethics approval from the associated tertiary institution.

Mutch (2013) makes distinctions between research that is with, for, on and about children/young people. This study is situated as research *with* young people. However, it needs to be recognised that the seven interview participants and the six members of the focus group represent a small group of young people from refugee backgrounds living in Christchurch. Further, this study does not accommodate the voices of children from these communities. This represents an area that needs further inquiry; however there are inspiring examples of how work with children in disaster contexts can be done (for instance see, Gaillard & Pangilinan, 2010; Mutch, 2013). One of the universal rights outlined in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is to have a voice in issues that affect them. Nevertheless, most research is "adult-centric" (Mutch, 2013), and whilst children and young people constitute a large portion of the population, their voices are largely under-acknowledged in disaster risk reduction processes. This study ensured that young people's voices were included in the information gathering and analysis processes as the interviews conducted with them not only recognised young people's fundamental right to participate in matters that directly affect them, but also acknowledged that youth have a large role in disaster recovery efforts.

5.1 Results – Young People's Responses to the Earthquakes

This section is divided into two parts. The first focuses on young people's important roles acting as bridges linking their community to key information, resources and networks. The second highlights their experiences and ideas about responding to the disaster, and the importance of creating inclusive spaces for belonging and participating within civil society.

5.1.1 Linguistic and Digital Bridges

The young people in this study stated that they felt like they generally belonged in Christchurch—largely because of their schooling experiences. Whilst they are Facebook friends with people from their own ethnically defined communities, they are also connected with the wider Christchurch society (through school/education centres) thus linking them to additional forms of social capital. The

young people commented on how this benefited them, and how this could possibly benefit the older generations in their communities. As noted earlier, one of the most crucial factors for risk reduction with CALD groups is the ability to access and understand safety and official information, thus highlighting the need for linguistic competency and social capital resources. For some Christchurch refugee background communities, the primary source of information and connection to external assistance was through the young people, who assumed a role of a linguistic bridge to share and interpret vital information to their elders and community.

You sort of forget the stress of the earthquake or anything, you just talk with your friends, sit at the table, you could speak well with them, you could speak with [your elders] because if you're speaking English with them they probably don't understand but you go there, you speak your own language and they really understand. You help them with any news and stuff. They get many feedback from you; you just tell them the news. You say hey like, the news said that will happen, this will happen and they can prepare for whatever happens. (Afghan male)

It would be really good if the elderly in the community have help after the earthquake because they are the ones that make decisions for family. (University focus group)

With the translators – when I was at Work and Income there was an elderly couple that came and saw me, they were Afghani. They had no children here, no daughters; they were the only ones that lived here. So they were asking me why the New Zealand government in the first place brought them here when they can't actually help them out to move to another city because they were traumatised because of the quake. Those things need to be taken into consideration. (University focus group)

After the earthquakes, the challenges for older people to access reliable communication and support were significant (see Author, in press)These quotes demonstrate how the young people acted as communicators by relaying important official and safety information to the elders, and by ensuring that crucial information was received and understood.

Within the larger study of which the young people are a part (see Author, 2013), most of the adult participants stated that they do not use social media and/or digital technologies such as Facebook and smart phones. However, most of these older participants noted that at least one person in their household was active on social media and other digital platforms, and this individual was usually a young person. The younger participants themselves explained that they used Facebook to update and communicate with friends and family (local and overseas) about their well-being and the earthquakes which helped alleviate stress and misinformation and created ways for people to reconnect with one another.

After the earthquake we used cell phones or internet to just get information and keep in touch with each other. (Eritrean male)

But it's not that they don't have a computer or internet access, it's that they [older community members] don't want to use it or learn how to use it. (Somali female)

I Facebook my friends and family to let them know how, if you're living here with the earthquake, they worry about us. We keep telling, update information. My cousins, my family, my aunties, my Kiwi friends. I have heaps of Kiwi friends [from school]. (Afghan male)

Thus, these young people acted as linguistic and digital bridges" for their immediate family with those who are overseas, as well as with the wider Christchurch and New Zealand networks. Whilst the young people stated that they generally felt a sense of belonging and that this helped them to engage with the wider society, they also emphasised concerns about a lack of jobs and opportunities for young people in general and those from refugee backgrounds specifically.

5.1.2 Inclusive spaces and participating in the Christchurch recovery

The participants spoke about the need for their greater involvement in the recovery process, and voiced a concern about lack of employment and on-going education opportunities. They also spoke of the need for more inclusive social spaces and activities to better participate in the wider Christchurch community. Most participants commented on the importance of a community gathering space, where people could share information and provide support. The following examples illustrate the young people's thoughts on what needs to happen for Christchurch so that it is inclusive of their interests, needs and aspirations.

We need more job opportunities. I think that's a big factor why a lot of people leave. It was not something we could have predicted but it's just something that needs to be done about that. (Somali female)

Absolutely. If you're not studying that was the driving force [for people to leave]. Employment and education, those two. For the younger generation. (University focus group)

Yes. I mean, it's not the entire reason but most [job is an important factor] because if you say the job is very important, if you have a job – you can do many things but if you don't have a job, what do you do? Nothing. (Eritrean male)

Whilst these statements were clearly about finding linkages with their education and training to jobs, the participants also noted the need for more engaging civic spaces that were exciting and inclusive:

Life is not just about working and getting money, it's just about having fun and other stuff and if you don't have the fun in Christchurch people are just going to seek opportunities somewhere else. (Afghan male)

They should make Christchurch more interesting. As a teen there is not really much to do. All I do is play soccer. There is no town. Make better facilities, bussing, transport, more things to do. They used to have swimming pools and stuff but now it's all broken. They should rebuild more facilities for teens and families. (Kurdish male)

These comments coincide with the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA, 2014) well-being report that found that young people in Canterbury have little to do, and Christchurch residents overwhelmingly (69% of those surveyed) mentioned experiencing a loss of recreational, cultural and leisure time facilities. Young people tend to be perceived as passive victims in disaster situations and are often excluded from participating in response and recovery processes; generally, infants are conceptualised as the most vulnerable and adults as the most capable, thus young people's needs tend to be overlooked (Mutch, 2013, p. 446). These previous statements support the findings of the CERA report and underline the need for greater employment and education opportunities, and more engaging activities and spaces for young people in disaster risk reduction initiatives.

Though the concerns about equity of access to education, employment and other ways of engaging in civic society are not new within the refugee settlement literature in New Zealand (O'Donovan and Sheikh, 2014; Elliott and Yusuf, 2014); the earthquakes have exacerbated these concerns (Author, in press). As one participant notes, there is a greater need for young people from refugee backgrounds to work with the government and non-government sectors to more effectively develop disaster risk reduction initiatives:

> *Yes and probably [more help for] refugee, not just my community, from any community, get more young educated [students] to get to work with them. If I tell you my experience it wouldn't be the same as the experience for the Kiwi guy, people who are born here. We definitely face life differently from what the Kiwi does, Kiwi kids. I think it's probably a good thing if government wants to improve things; they probably need to get more people from refugee background to work with them on planning stuff. (Afghan male)*

This paper now draws the above themes together to ascertain the ways that young people can act as bridges to connect their respective community to particular resources, information and opportunities in disaster contexts.

6.1 Discussion: Young People as Bridges for Community Recovery

Successful recovery depends on individual and community-based capacities to respond to the impacts and ensuing effects of a disaster. Whilst recovery involves the interplay of a number of factors previously discussed (structural, political, cultural and social), the ability to understand and communicate disaster-related communications is vital. Young people of refugee backgrounds can provide these cultural, technological and linguistic bridges with CALD communities, the wider society and external support organisations. The findings of this study particularly present three key contributions that young people can bring to disaster risk reduction through their digital and linguistic literacies, roles as cultural brokers and their overall capacities contributing to their community's and the wider society's resilience in a disaster context.

6.1.1 Digital and Linguistic literacies

Young people have significant digital and linguistic literacies that can serve as bridges to connect their communities with wider disaster mitigation efforts. Seeing that young people from refugee backgrounds often have higher rates of written and spoken competencies in the host-country language than their elders means that they can play an critical role in interpreting key health and safety information, updates, and notices from aid organizations, the government and social service providers. These young people often become the ears and the voice of their particular community, acting as bridges with the larger society and organizations.

In addition, young people from refugee backgrounds tend to be one of the most (or possibly only) digitally literate people in their respective households and communities. With contemporary disaster risk reduction strategies, social media and other digital applications are increasingly considered important channels for information sharing (Eiser et al., 2012). Young people from refugee backgrounds are more likely to have greater literacies with digital technologies such as smart phones, apps, social media and other web-based platforms (Gifford & Wilding, 2013; Wilding, 2012). Hampshire et al. (2008, p. 30) note that, "Young people typically learn the skills needed to access internet facilities, enabling them to maintain ties with friends and families abroad (and even create new Internet-based relationships) more effectively than elders." Successful disaster communication is now provided across multiple mediums to ensure that similar messages reach different demographics of any given population, including print, radio, television and internet-based information sources (Eiser et al., 2012). Again, young people represent a key resource in ensuring that such digital messages are received. Participants noted in this study that Facebook, mobile phones and email were important tools in linking intra-ethnic communities back together. This was not only true for the associated community living locally but these methods also provided a way to contact and communicate with friends and family living abroad. As Wilding (2012) explains, young people from refugee backgrounds are able to maintain their ethnic traditions and intra-ethnic social networks and communities, whilst also participating in a broader and more global youth culture. Computer technologies, smart phones and the internet are central to this bridging capacity. In these contexts, the ability of young people to live and participate in multiple social circles, namely their ethnic communities, the wider society and with friends/family overseas, provides crucial resources and information to all parties for disaster risk reduction and mitigation.

6.1.2 Young People as Cultural brokers

Young people can also operate as cultural brokers who can connect decision-making elders and leaders in their communities with important external networks, information and resources. Faulstich Orellana (2007) describes the role of children of Mexican immigrants in the United States as

"language brokers" and "family interpreters" between the English-speaking host society and their family members, particularly parents and older relatives. The space in which two cultures meet and must interact has been described as the "contact zone" (Faulstich Orellana, 2007), and often it is the children of immigrants who become most familiar with the local laws, customs and ways of working within the system (Renzaho et al., 2011). These are paradoxical situations in which children and young people become translators and mediate this contact zone because, while children of immigrants (and in general) are considered more vulnerable and hold little authority to speak, they must communicate the words of those who are considered to hold more power or authority (i.e., doctors, teachers, disaster planners and emergency responders). Thus a shift of power relations can occur as the young translators from immigrant minority groups, representing subaltern and/or marginalised voices in the wider society, articulate the words and the voices of institutional representatives and authority figures when translating to their families (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Renzaho et al., 2011). Tensions are often inherent in this dynamic, as those usually considered subordinate or most vulnerable articulate the voices of those most powerful, whether within the family structure or in societal rankings. Nevertheless, in the event of a disaster, young people from refugee backgrounds acting as translators and cultural brokers represent a crucial component to the community's well-being and ability to resist, cope and recover from the associated adverse circumstances. For this resource to be better realised, there is a need for a stronger structural recognition of young people in disaster risk reduction and also a community endorsed and proactive plan that involves its younger generations in developing mitigation plans that are culturally resonant and responsive.

6.1.3 Inclusion, Resilience and Young People

In many respects, young people are resilient, and an understanding of the interplay between vulnerabilities and capacities provides a meaningful way to greater ensure their safety and wider participation in civil society. Gaillard (2010) defines resilience as the capability of an individual or community to adapt to, and/or cope with, the stress following a disaster; this will include the preparedness of the actors prior to the event, but also the planned or spontaneous adjustments undertaken in the aftermath. Further, Aldrich (2012, p. 15) argues that "high levels of social capital—more than such commonly referenced factors such as socioeconomic conditions, population density, and amount of damage or aid—serve as a core engine of recovery. Survivors with strong social networks experience faster recoveries and have access to needed information, tools, and assistance". In numerous ways young people from refugee backgrounds offered these networks through their social capital resources, linguistic competencies and technological literacies. Nevertheless, nearly all participants in this study noted how the city had fewer places for them to engage and that it was difficult to find meaningful work. The links that these young people can make between their community, the wider society and institutions represents a critical resource that can connect groups

across linguistic, cultural and technological divides. The ways in which the government, non-government organisations and respective community leaders support these opportunities mean that there remains an under-utilised resource—one that could significantly improve disaster risk reduction for CALD groups.

Young people can serve as cultural brokers with key groups such as civil defence, city council, social welfare and refugee specific organisations to ensure that there are effective communication channels with community leaders. Within a number of refugee background communities, the elders are often the ones who make important decisions that have an impact on their respective members. Numerous authors acknowledge, however, that parents and children from refugee backgrounds adjust at different rates to the new country and culture (Author, 2013; Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury, 2011; Waters et al., 2010). Because children and young people are in school and are more likely to interact with broader and more diverse social networks, they are in constant contact and exchange information with members of the wider society. Through these continuous social encounters, young people learn the host language, and begin to understand, acculturate to, and possibly integrate with, local norms, social protocols and cultural protocols. These on-going social interactions lead to "bridging relationships" between the youth from refugee background communities and individuals and organizations (e.g., school, sport groups/clubs) from the wider society. Research from Christchurch, however, suggests that the closures of a number of schools and loss of public spaces for activity has reduced participation and a sense of belonging in several instances (Mutch, 2014). As the reconstruction and renvisioning of Christchurch continues, the ways in which young people can participate more fully in such public spaces represents a critical element for nurturing the forms of social capital that bring people together within and across different forms of identity.

It is also necessary to critique the vulnerability paradigm for young people in disasters. Whilst young people and children can have particular vulnerabilities to a disaster, it does not follow that they are inevitably or indelibly vulnerable. The strengths approach focuses on the individuals (or community's) capacities and potential and opportunity for growth (Saleebey, 1996). In a disaster context, the strengths model emphasizes the capacities and assets of the affected community; some assets may include individual, organizational, societal and physical assets, as well as different non-governmental/voluntary organizations, cultural groups and religious organizations (Tan & Yuen, 2013, pp. 2-3). Alongside this awareness is the need to recognise that young people *generally* and those from refugee backgrounds *specifically* at times have constrained opportunities to integrate and engage with the broader society. Even if young people from refugee backgrounds have high levels of social capital, these resources can be difficult to access and mobilise in situations where discrimination is present. It is also important to recognise as study limitation that most of the

participants in the study were either university educated or studying at a tertiary institution and their views/experiences may not reflect young people from refugee backgrounds living in Christchurch more broadly. And finally, it is necessary to not romanticise the promise of 'community' to recognise that whilst this term (often defined along ethnic based groupings) is something that is central to many refugees' experiences of settlement, it is also to recognise that it represents a contested and political space. There will also be instances where young people will look for older members of their community to provide leadership and support to help them. For these reasons, the ways in which young people and the members of their community more widely can participate in disaster risk reduction need to be conceptualised within a holistic and ecological frame that locates them alongside the confluence of a number of cultural, social, political, economic and historical intersections.

Young people as communicators, educators, bridges and cultural brokers represent clear assets to refugee background communities. These assets represent a significant resource for disaster risk reduction initiatives though there are potential challenges to meaningfully collaborate with young people. For the assets and bridging capacities mentioned above to be further acknowledged, there are greater needs for community development models of engagement that incorporate young people into disaster planning (see Mitchell et al, 2008) and wider recognition within government and non-government organisations of the important roles that they can assume.

7.1 Conclusion

During and after the earthquakes, the young people from refugee background communities assumed roles of connecting their immediate families and communities with the wider Christchurch and New Zealand societies and with loved ones overseas. Their language and digital literacies allowed for this crucial undertaking and meant that their communities were able to receive and understand the vital information being disseminated. Without these "bridges", the refugee background community would not have had access to the networks and resources that connected them with important information and forms of support during the earthquake response periods.

In the context of disaster, Mitchell (2003) emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge, planning, effective communication and collaborative partnerships with CALD communities for effective disaster mitigation. Because young people begin to integrate the host society language and practices into their own cultural identities more quickly than their elders, they can act as bridges between their own families and communities, the wider society and external support organisations. Twenty-seven countries now have formal refugee resettlement programmes and nearly 100,000 people were resettled in 2013 worldwide. Young people and children comprise a significant component of this group; acknowledging their capacities is crucial considering they can provide valuable linguistic and digital

literacies alongside rich social capital resources. The Ministry of Youth Affairs (2002) outlined crucial principles that contribute to youth development and wellbeing, and included the need for young people to be connected and maintain quality relationships, to participate and to access good information. The strength of individual and community-based assets depends on the relationships and capacities that link people within particular groups, across society and supportive organisations, and young people from refugee backgrounds represent a key component to the creation of these ties on multiple levels. Finding ways to meaningfully incorporate young people into disaster mitigation strategies represents an area where further work can be done so that particular community groups are better prepared and have proactive plans to respond if and when a disaster occurs.

8.1 References

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