

# **FOSTERING AGENCY, BELONGING AND WELLBEING FOR ASYLUM-SEEKING MOTHERS AT A COMMUNITY-BASED PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAM**

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**Background:** Research has shown that asylum seekers experience higher degrees of psychological distress compared to other immigrants, resulting from post-migration difficulties including social exclusion, and the challenges of remaking one's identity and sense of meaning following war and social conflict (Ghahari, Lui, Nagra, & Morassaei, 2019; Silove, Ventevogel, & Rees, 2017). Further, the experiences of asylum-seeking mothers are unique amongst asylum seekers given that they have to navigate changing gender, parenting and often professional identities during resettlement. Community-based services may provide psychosocial support to asylum seekers; however, few studies have examined how such programs may support mothers' reestablishment of identity, including their capacity to exert agency and their sense of belonging. **Objectives:** The current study aims to explore 1) how asylum-seeking mothers re-establish their own agency and sense of belonging during their resettlement process in Montreal and 2) what impact does attending a community-based psychosocial support program have on their sense of belonging and experience of agency?

**Methods:** Based on an ethnographic approach, the current study will use i) semi-structured interviews conducted with asylum-seeking mothers, and ii) participant observation during program activities. Conceptual coding and thematic content analysis will be subsequently conducted to identify emerging themes within an ecosocial framework, with a special attention to narratives of identity, belonging and expression of agency, and how the program may facilitate this.

**Potential Outcomes & Implications:** By better understanding mothers' experiences of belonging (or exclusion), their perceptions of themselves as agentic, and especially how participation in a community-based program can enhance these aspects of their identity, service providers and clinicians may gain insight into how to better support this vulnerabalized population. The result also has the potential to contribute to the development of policies and interventions that promote the agency, belonging and therefore well-being of asylum-seeking mothers and their families.

## **Full List of Authors**

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## **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Describe how asylum-seeking mothers' view themselves as agentic and how their sense of belonging (or exclusion) informs their narratives of identity and self during resettlement.
2. Propose how a community-based psychosocial support program may facilitate asylum-seeking mothers' sense of agency and belonging, and the rebuilding of a sense of self.