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# **International Relocation: Unpacking the Stress**

## **Stressors**

I was raised in a small Refugee Camp in Malawi, and it never crossed my mind that after living in the camp for 16 years that I would one day travel overseas and pursue my higher education. However, on July 31st, 2017, in recognition of my academic excellence and community engagement in the Refugee Camp, the Canadian government awarded me a UBC scholarship and a B.C permanent residency. I was given a year in between my travel to prepare for my significant relocation. Still, when I arrived in Canada, I felt like I was not familiar with almost everything in the new country, despite the books, videos and other pre-departure information that I was given to help familiarize myself with Canada.

An international move to me was both a severe mental and logistical challenge. Even though I carefully planned my relocation for a few months, I still had a fair share of nervous breakdowns and panic attacks.

In my first year at UBC, I struggled with almost everything, starting from my academics to my social connections. I had to learn essential things considered normative to most of my peers who grew up with the privilege of being exposed to this part of the world. I discerned that most of the tasks at the university depend on the use of electronics, so I had to learn how to use devices such as laptops, phones, washing machines and printers.

I was not accustomed to the Canadian education system; for instance, how to navigate my assignments and how to approach my professors when I have an inquiry.

Besides, I did not have any friends around, and I desired my family, but I could not call them because the internet connection in the refugee camp where they live is terrible. All these stressors made my first-year at UBC unpleasant. However, still, I anticipate more stressors in the prospect as I will be graduating soon, and I am not familiar with Canadian life after college, I sense I will have challenges with the employment industry.

## **Strategies**

In my first attempt to deal with my stressors, I followed the wrong approach. I detached myself from the community, which I realized was doing extra harm to my wellbeing. I had the

impression that if I had persevered living in a refugee camp for 16 years, then I could endure the stressors that I was encountering in my stay at UBC. However, later on, it occurred to me that in the refugee camp, I had my family and community providing me with social support as I was navigating through daily stressors. Therefore, I started going to the wellness centre for social support, I excised regularly, I started attending social events, and I decided to be open to new experiences. Also, I am currently exercising a new approach for this assignment. It involves connecting with nature through practicing mindful yoga and meditating for twenty minutes early in the morning and over the weekend meditating in nature, for instance, at the park, beach and forest.

## **Evidence**

Mindful yoga is an intervention that integrates yoga practices with responses from mindfulness-based stress reduction programmes. In a qualitative descriptive study conducted by Lee et al. (2019), eighteen in-depth individual interviews were conducted with nine participants who were registered in a mindful yoga programme. The study aimed at determining the benefits of mindful yoga impartially from each participant. The participants noted that mindful yoga helped them build a peaceful mind, which resulted in a calmness that made them feel safe and at peace. They reported that these positive changes in feelings resulted from having a reduction in fearful thoughts and associated anxiety. Some participants explained how long-term pain was relieved because they were able to directly relax their muscles using yoga poses or by refocusing their attention from a specific area of bodily pain using body scanning techniques (Lee et al., 2019).

The benefits of mediation may be attributed to its nature. Baer et al. (2006) in their study on mindful meditation found that most of the five principles facets of mindfulness, which are observing, describing, acting with awareness, not judging inner experiences and not reacting to emotional experiences, are significantly related to meditation experience and well-being, unlike experimental avoidance and thoughts suppression. Mindful meditation can, therefore, prevent depression relapse by interrupting cycles of avoidance and over engagement (Segal et al., 2002).

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Scioli-Salter et al. (2016) on the benefits of social interactions and physical exercises on participants with PTSD from military experiences and

chronic stress. Both observational and intervention studies provide support for the notion that aerobic exercise, either alone or in combination with standard treatments, exerts positive mental health benefits among individuals with PTSD. The results are encouraging as positive effects were observed in both civilian and military populations, as well as in both predominately female and male study participants.

## **Reflection**

I resolved to base part of my research for this assignment on the benefits of social interactions and physical exercises on participants with PTSD, because seldom I feel like I am reliving a war trauma from my childhood through upsetting thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks, or having powerful mental and physical reactions if something reminds me of the tragedy. The findings in the study have been beneficial in improving my mental well-being and equipped me with skills on how to navigate PTSD experiences without being traumatized or stressed about them.

Besides, the new strategy that I am currently following as part of the elements of this assignment has been significant in terms of enhancing my mindfulness routines. Through early morning meditation and mindful yoga in nature, I have been able to reflect on my existence and relationship to the natural world. Yoga and Meditation has also enhanced my sensitivity and resilience in challenging situations; for instance, I used to panic a lot before a major interview or an exam, but after a few practices of Meditation and Diaphragmatic breathing, I feel relaxed before taking a major decision or writing an exam. Although I started practicing these new techniques because it was expected for the class, Still, I will sustain the practices and incorporate them further into my regular liveliness as they are helping me thrive.

## **Reference:**

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