

## **Manifested resilience by colombian refugees in their resettlement in new Zealand**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research explores how Colombian refugees have manifested resilience in their resettlement and integration process in New Zealand. This study recruited 13 former Colombian refugees who were resettled in New Zealand from Ecuador, where they were recognised as refugees by the government of Ecuador and with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). One reason for conducting this investigation was the lack of academic research on Colombian refugees in New Zealand, and to explore how they manifest resilience after their resettlement in New Zealand. But also, to contribute to the development of research on Colombian refugees in New Zealand and to contribute to all New Zealand refugee organisations with their resettlement and integration programmes in the country. Oral history and ethnography are the methodologies used in this study. 12 semi-structured oral history interviews were conducted with the participants. One focus group was also conducted, and four participants presented their written diaries. The findings of this research showed that the resilience demonstrated by Colombian refugees in New Zealand has been the key to overcoming the challenges of integration in the country, mainly the lack of English, mental health problems, discrimination, and unemployment.

**Keywords:** resilience, colombian refugees, integration, resettlement, lack of english.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Since 2007, New Zealand began receiving Colombian refugees from Ecuador. Before arriving in New Zealand, these people used to live in Ecuador as refugees. They had to flee from Colombia due to the war that this country is facing. During the last 60 years, Marxist and Leninist idealist groups have fought against the armed forces of the government to implement a communist government in Colombia. The presence of right-wing paramilitary groups that fight against the guerrillas has sharpened the armed conflict in the country. This armed conflict has been responsible for almost half a million Colombians living as refugees in many countries of the world. Ecuador has received some 100,000 Colombian refugees.

In their fleeing to Ecuador, Colombian refugees abandoned all their belongings in Colombia. Once in Ecuador, these people try to start a new life away from the Colombian armed conflict. However, this is not easy for them, because they have to fight against traumas caused by experiencing the war in their

country. These traumas usually cause them sadness, depression, and much nostalgia for leaving behind their country of origin as well as their family and friends. Besides, Colombian refugees in Ecuador have to face social discrimination and economic problems. All this makes integration for Colombian refugees in Ecuador very difficult. For this reason, the UNHCR recommends some refugees to be resettled in New Zealand, and thus have a better quality of life.

Once resettled in New Zealand, Colombian refugees enjoy a better quality of life. However, they have to continue facing matters related to mental health, discrimination, lack of English, and unemployment. All these problems put at risk the successful integration of Colombian refugees in New Zealand. Nevertheless, over time these people have gradually been able to develop resilience which has helped them to overcome the challenges of living in New Zealand and be able to adapt to life in this country. Resilience has also allowed these refugees to accept New Zealand as their new country and be willing to rebuild their lives there.

### 1.1 RATIONALE FOR THE CURRENT RESEARCH

Up to the present time, little research has been conducted on Colombian refugees in New Zealand. The review of the literature shows a significant gap in studies on Colombian refugees in New Zealand. Although Colombian refugees have been in New Zealand for more than 10 years, no articles have been published yet. Therefore, this study aims to explore the stories of 13 Colombian refugees in New Zealand to investigate how these refugees have demonstrated resilience during their resettlement and integration process in New Zealand. Among other purposes, the study aims to contribute to the development of research on Colombian refugees in New Zealand and to contribute to all New Zealand refugee organisations with their resettlement and integration programmes in the country. That is why in this study we sought to answer the following research question:

How have Colombian refugees demonstrated resilience in their resettlement and integration in New Zealand?

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is chiefly built on literature about resilience. According to Lim and Han (2016) resilience "is associated with successful adaptation and refers to one's ability to effectively adapt to stress caused by serious trauma or adversity" (p. 167). Likewise, Brand and Jax (2007), affirm that resilience is "the ability of groups or communities to cope with external stresses and disturbances as a result of social, political, and environmental change" (p. 3). Therefore, it could be said that resilience is an internal force that many people manifest to overcome extremely difficult situations (Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012). In this way, resilience allows the person to adapt to new circumstances

of life to survive. It would be understood then that resilience can help a person to overcome the pain caused by the death of a loved one (Ssenyonga, Owens, & Olema, 2013). The same can be said of thousands of refugees who have experienced various traumatic experiences (Ssenyonga et al., 2013). A multitude of these refugees has been victims of terrible wars, which has affected their mental health. However, resilience has allowed a lot of them to recover from their traumas and to lead a normal life (Kent, Davis, & Reich 2014; Lenette et al., 2012; Ssenyonga et al., 2013; Swaroop & DeLoach 2015).

Numerous studies on the mental health issues have been conducted and resilience manifested by refugees in the world (Bonanno, Westphal & Mancini, 2011; Darychuk & Jackson 2015; Kalmanowitz & Ho 2016; Kent, Davis & Reich 2014; Lenette et al 2012; Lim & Han 2016; Nam et al 2016; Palacio et al 1999; Puvimanasinghe et al 2015; Riley & Masten 2005; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012; Sleijpen et al 2013; Slobodin & de Jong 2015; Swaroop & Deloach 2015; Tippen 2016). Moreover, those studies show that many refugees suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and they need to develop resilience to overcome this mental health issue. The National Institute of Mental Health (2016, p. 1) defines Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as "a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event". Normally, bad dreams, racing heart and sweating, reliving the trauma over and over (flashbacks), and frightening thoughts are the most common symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, 2016).

The Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder faced by the refugees is associated with their traumas. According to Shapiro (2014), "the word trauma comes from Greek and means 'wound'. Trauma is a 'psychological injury' which can be caused by different situations" (p. 3). Similarly, McCann and Pearlman (1990) argue that:

We define psychological trauma as follow: An experience is traumatic if it 1) is sudden, unexpected, or non-normative, 2) exceeds the individual's perceived ability to meet its demand, and 3) disrupts the individual's frame of reference and other central psychological needs and related schemas. (p. 10)

Even though many refugees have suffered traumas and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, they need to overcome or cope successfully with these problems to get their adaptation and integration in the country of asylum (Ssenyonga et al., 2013). Many studies have shown that some form of resilience has helped refugees to achieve successful integration in the countries of refuge (King et al., 1998; Lenette et al., 2012; Palacio et al., 1999; Lim et al., 2016).

### 3 METHODOLOGY

Oral history and ethnography are the qualitative methodological approach that we employed in this study. Oral history is a research method normally used in qualitative studies. It allows the researcher

to collect the life stories of the participants and document them in audio or video. Besides, this method allows to document the narrated stories by the participants in chronological order, and thus in this way to have a general and more complete picture of their biography (Yow, 2005; Haynes, 2006). With this in mind, this study includes 13 oral stories with the participants, who told their life histories chronologically, from their life in Colombia to their resettlement in New Zealand. As already mentioned, also ethnography is implemented in this research as a methodological approach. "Ethnography is a qualitative approach in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group" (Revell, 12, p. 65). Likewise, O'Leary (2014), says that ethnography is "the study of cultural groups in a bid to understand, describe and interpret a way of life from the point of view of its participants" (p. 133).

### 3.1 DATA SOURCES

In this qualitative study, I used three data collection methods: oral history interviews, a focus group and diaries or journals. In detail, 12 semi-structured oral history interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants in Hamilton, New Zealand. These were conducted in Spanish, the mother tongue of the participants. Each interview had an average duration of 54 minutes. These interviews were recorded on audio and subsequently transcribed and translated into English. With this objective, we counted on the help of a recognized translator to corroborate that the interviews had been translated correctly from Spanish to English. During the interviews, the participants felt completely comfortable and relaxed. For this reason, they were able to express their thoughts and ideas freely. Also, more than 10 days in advance, the participants received a copy of the interview questionnaire. In this way, they had enough time to review the questions and refresh their memory about the events of their lives that would be reported by them in the oral history interviews.

We also used the formation of a focus group as the second method of data collection for this study. This group was composed of three participants, two women and one man. This meeting lasted a little over an hour and was conducted in Spanish. Subsequently, this collective interview was transcribed and translated into English. Notably, the participants were very happy to relate their life experiences, while conducting the focus group. Diaries or journals were the third data source employed by us in this study. The purpose of the diaries was to determine the level of integration of the participants in New Zealand. For this, participants would have to write for 40 days a small portion of information about their daily activities and also about their feelings towards New Zealand. Four participants presented their written diaries, which were very helpful in determining the level of integration of these people in New Zealand.

### 3.2 PARTICIPANTS

As previously described, 13 former Colombian refugees took part in this study, four men and nine women. The average age of the participants was 45 years old. The youngest is 21 years old and the oldest is 67 years old. The criteria to select the participants were the following: 1) Being a former Colombian refugee. 2) Having been recognised as a refugee in Ecuador. 3) Having been resettled in New Zealand from Ecuador. 4) Older than 18 years.

### 3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, we performed a qualitative data analysis. According to Taylor and Gibbs (2010), “Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) is the range of processes and procedures whereby we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations we are investigating” (p. 5). Likewise, O’Leary, (2004) says that “qualitative data analysis involves the use of inductive (discovering) and/or deductive (uncovering) reasoning to generate and interpret relevant themes to achieve meaningful understanding” (p. 195). Thus, our analysis techniques include the following procedures: 1) collecting data, 2) transcribing and sorting data, 3) coding data, 4) integrating information and looking for meaning in all of the data, 5) interpreting data and 6) drawing conclusions (Fernandez, 2016; Calliou, 2004). Using the already described analysis method, we were able to find patterns that allowed us to create 60 codes and summarize it into two main themes which are 1) Resilience while living in Ecuador and 2) Challenges in New Zealand.

## 4 FINDINGS (RESULTS)

As previously described, the findings of this study are described in two themes, which are resilience while living in Ecuador and challenges in New Zealand. The first theme shows the living conditions of Colombian refugees in Ecuador. In that country, Colombian refugees had to face social and racial discrimination as well as economic issues. These problems made integration harder for Colombian refugees in Ecuador. The second theme describes the challenges faced by Colombian refugees once in New Zealand, such as the lack of English, mental health issues, discrimination, and unemployment

### 4.1 RESILIENCE WHILE LIVING IN ECUADOR

Ecuador is the main country where many Colombians flee in search of international protection. Upon arriving in Ecuador, Colombian refugees try to start a new life away from the Colombian armed conflict. However, this is not easy for the vast majority of them. This is due in large part to the extensive discrimination that exists in Ecuador towards Colombians. Although Colombia and Ecuador are considered brother countries that share similar cultural aspects, like language, they have marked

differences such as accent, meals, music and traditional customs. Furthermore, the Ecuadorian economy is less developed than the Colombian one, reason why unemployment abounds in that country. All these aspects make integration much more complex for Colombian refugees in Ecuador. Nevertheless, the main motivation for these refugees was to be able to live in peace in Ecuador, the words of a participant in this study show that:

*We travelled to Ecuador with great hope, having been beaten by violence in Colombia and having lost everything, the great hope was to take refuge in Ecuador, especially to find peace and tranquillity, and take refuge not only before Government but also to find tranquillity and peace that was what interested me the most (Participant 1).*

In Ecuador, most of the participants hoped to find peace and tranquillity that they had not found in Colombia. However, in Ecuador, they enjoyed some calm but they did not find complete peace of mind. To explain, many of them were afraid that in Ecuador they would encounter combatants from the Colombian armed conflict posing as refugees. In this way, many Colombian refugees in Ecuador used to fear being found and killed by their persecutors. In fact, it has been known that some Colombian refugees have been murdered in Ecuador. All this means that Colombian refugees do not feel safe in Ecuador.

Discrimination is another issue that affects the peace of mind of Colombian refugees in Ecuador. Therefore, to know the level of discrimination experienced by Colombian refugees in Ecuador, we proceeded to ask the following question to the participants: In Ecuador, did you experience discrimination because you were a Colombian refugee? A 60-year-old participant said:

*Actually, yes; at all times, they treat one badly with vulgar, contemptuous and humiliating words. I say that you go to Ecuador in search of protection and I have no complaints from the state of Ecuador, but I do have a lot of complaints from people because they discriminated against me. Ecuadorians call the Colombians the worst. One is worthless there. While in Colombia one sees many Ecuadorian's working in different jobs and one does not discriminate against them; on the contrary, what one does is to support those Ecuadorians who work in Colombia (Participant 7).*

Equally another 26-year-old participant states:

*Yes, honestly yes. I think Ecuador is one of the countries that do not like Colombians. In Ecuador, the people, just listening to my accent, called me a thief, a murderer and a criminal. I once worked with a man who lent money, and when I was going to collect my employer's money people discriminated against me. When I was a victim of this discrimination, I was very upset but I preferred not to say anything. However, one day the owner of the restaurant where I worked began to say that the Colombians were criminals who deserved to be burned alive and deported to their country. These statements made me very angry and filled me with anger, and so I had an argument with that gentleman (Participant 6).*

The kind of discrimination experienced by Colombian refugees in Ecuador is manifested in different spheres of society. To illustrate, a 43-year-old female participant states that her eldest son was physically beaten by a teacher at the school. The teacher said that all Colombians in Ecuador were drug traffickers, thieves, murderers and criminals; Also, the teacher argued that Colombian women in Ecuador were prostitutes. In like manner, another 42-year-old participant states that she had to face discrimination even when shopping in stores, according to her, many times when the shopkeepers realised that she was a Colombian, they refused to sell to her. The shopkeepers used to say that the store was out of stock of those particular products. To which, the Colombian refugee said that the products were there, in plain sight, but the shopkeeper simply argued that they do not sell any product to Colombians. By the same token, other Colombians, say that they had to face discrimination when trying to rent a room. So, many Ecuadorians did not want to rent rooms to Colombians. Identically, it happened when searching for a job. According to the participants, employers usually did not want to hire Colombians; employers complained that Colombians were not worthy of trust. When some Colombians were hired, they did not receive a decent salary or simply did not receive any salary at all.

Important to realize, in Colombia, the participants had not faced social and racial discrimination, but they had been victims of violence, for that reason they fled to Ecuador where they found the peace they had not experienced in Colombia, but once in Ecuador, they were the target of severe discrimination. That is to say, in both countries they had to face different difficulties that put their peace of mind at risk. Correspondingly, in Ecuador, the participants had to face serious economic problems. To demonstrate, a 22-year-old participant describes her economic situation when she arrived in Ecuador:

*My first impressions when I arrived in Ecuador were not the best because when we arrived at the house that my mother had rented, I saw that house was empty, there were only mattresses on the floor. At that, my mother told us not to worry about not having material things in the house, and also told us that we were going to get ahead because she was a fighter. When I remember this, I feel like crying ... because it stimulates me to fight to get ahead (participant 4).*

Likewise, another participant describes her difficult economic situation in Ecuador as follows:

*My living conditions were not easy due to lack of money, but a friend from Colombia was very good to me and she guided me and helped me to get food on credit in a store. Then a person offered me a job in a store selling clothes. And she told me I could sleep in the kitchen with my son. So, I had to work seven days a week, and my salary would be a daily lunch that would have to share with my son and being able to sleep on a mattress lying on the kitchen floor of that place. There I worked as a slave because I think that a person who works seven days a week for daily lunch and hosting is a slave. But I had no choice. Being able to sleep in that place and receive a daily lunch was all the salary I received for working seven days a week in that store selling clothes (Participant 2).*

Most of the participants claim to have experienced economic problems in Ecuador, especially at the time of arrival in the country. A participant says: “At first, my life in Ecuador was very difficult because we arrived with nothing and had to sleep for many weeks in a wagon train where it was too hot. The food was also very poor”. The discrimination that the participants experienced in that country made it more difficult to improve their economic status because due to discrimination it was difficult to get a job. All these problems mentioned above made the participants feel worried, sad and depressed. However, despite experiencing severe difficulties, they were able to develop resilience and this resilience gave them the strength to continue fighting in Ecuador and not returning to Colombia. For this reason, the participants were asked the following question: When you lived in Ecuador, did you ever think about returning to Colombia? A 65 years old participant says:

*No, I did not think to return to Colombia because the danger was very great that my family and I would be in danger if we returned to Colombia. This was very difficult for me because it was like having my heart divided. On the one hand, I had part of my family living with me in Ecuador, but on the other hand, I had another part of my family living in Colombia. I always thought that returning to Colombia was like exposing me to death (Participant 11).*

Another participant states:

*No, I never thought about returning because of the situation in Colombia. We also thought that going back to Colombia would make us have a more complicated life than we already had in Ecuador. So, I preferred to stay in Ecuador (Participant 9).*

A Colombian woman refugee affirms:

*No, I never thought to return to Colombia because I have always looked at myself as an enterprising woman, fighter and ready to surpass me. Then, I was ready to overcome the problems in Ecuador, and not give up on my goal to go ahead with my children (Participant 8).*

One more participant says:

*Yes, several times I was tempted to return to Colombia, but unfortunately, with everything that had happened to me in Colombia I could not return, and therefore had to resign myself to find another place or another solution, but to return to Colombia was not a wise decision, because those guerrilla organizations had threatened me with papers where they told me that my family and I were military targets. So, it was not good to return to Colombia because our lives would be in danger there (Participant 1).*

It is clear then that the life experiences of the Colombian refugees in Ecuador were not the best. But even so, they were willing to continue rebuilding their lives in that country and did not return to Colombia where their lives were in danger. The fact that these people went ahead in Ecuador is evidence



of resilience. Indeed, this agrees very well with what is described by Lenette et al. (2012) "resilience generally refers to an individual's psychological ability to overcome, learn from and adapt positively to life's adverse events" (p. 638). What was said by Lenette, Brough and Cox (2012) is reflected by the participants in Ecuador. Therefore, it can be seen that Colombian refugees were able to deploy resilience while living in Ecuador. In this sense, they were able to lead a normal life in Ecuador and were willing to continue striving to adapt to that country. All things considered, this positive and perseverant attitude of the refugees, fits very well with the definitions that the literature makes about resilience (Kent et al., 2014; Lenette et al., 2012; Ssenyonga et al., 2013; Swaroop & DeLoach 2015).

## 4.2 CHALLENGES IN NEW ZEALAND

Although all the participants of this study stated that they were willing to continue living in Ecuador and not return to Colombia, they were discontented with the problems relating to discrimination experienced in Ecuador. For this reason, they felt delighted when they were selected by UNHCR to be resettled in New Zealand. Certainly, the participants imagined that once they arrive in New Zealand, they would enjoy a better quality of life. Specifically, they thought that it would be very easy to get a job in New Zealand, which would allow them to be self-sufficient. They also thought that in New Zealand they would never be discriminated against as they were in Ecuador. However, once resettled in New Zealand, the participants discovered that refugees arriving in New Zealand have to face many challenges. Various researches show that the main challenges experienced by refugees in New Zealand are the lack of English, mental health issues, discrimination, unemployment, lack of social network or friends, difficulty getting recognition for overseas qualifications and lack of New Zealand work experience (Beaglehole 2013; Beaglehole 1988; Butcher, Spoonley and Trlin 2006; Change Makers Refugee Forum 2012; Chile 2007; Department of Labour 2004; Frost 2015; Gee 2017; Hayward 2011; Hylan 1997; Liev 2008; Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment 2012; Ministry of Social Development 2008; Mohamed 2011; Nash, Wong & Trlin 2004; New Zealand Immigration 2016; Pio 2010; Revell 2012; Sanchez 2016; Thomas & McKenzie 2005; Treen 2013; Yor 2016).

### 4.2.1 Lack of English

The first challenge faced by refugees upon arriving in New Zealand is the lack of English (Butcher et al., 2006; Department of Labour 2004; Mohamed 2011; Sanchez 2016; Yor 2016). Chiefly, the participants state that at the beginning, the lack of English was a very big barrier for communicating with people in New Zealand. For instance, one participant says that although she has been living in New Zealand for nine years her English is still very elementary. As a result, this Colombian woman is often accompanied by an interpreter when she attends appointments at Work and Income offices. Generally,

her children serve her as interpreters. She says that her children have learned to speak English well, henceforth they are the ones who speak on her behalf. Equally, the same happens when she receives letters from Work and Income. However, this Colombian refugee says that her lack of English has not been a real barrier to developing friendships with Kiwis. According to her, she has New Zealand friends and shares moments of fun with them. She also says that she is a friend of her children's friends.

Another 56-year-old Colombian refugee who arrived in New Zealand accompanied by his wife and three children experienced challenges to integrate into New Zealand without knowing English. This Colombian man found it very difficult to communicate with the employees of the refugee centre in Mangere, where he lived his first six weeks in New Zealand. Later, when this Colombian refugee was resettled in Hamilton, he had to continue facing the challenge of lack of English. According to this refugee, he felt very upset and depressed because he could not communicate with other people in the community. Moreover, he felt exasperated and did not want to hear people speak to him in English, a language he could not understand. He remembers that in those moments of rage he used to go out to walk alone through the streets of the neighbourhood trying to distract his mind and overcome his sadness. This Colombian refugee was taking these walks through the streets of Hamilton, he thought very seriously about returning to Ecuador, where he had very good friends and had no difficulty communicating with people of that country. Therefore, he decided to talk to his family and express his desire to return to Ecuador, but his family motivated him to continue living with them in New Zealand. Even so, this Colombian refugee says that at that time, he did not go back to Ecuador because financial matters prevented him from buying a flight ticket. It can be seen then, that the lack of English severely affected the emotional state of this Colombian, to the extent that he was willing to abandon his wife and three children to go back to Ecuador.

Like the two previously mentioned stories about the lack of English of the Colombian refugees resettled in New Zealand, most of the participants expressed similar feelings. They state that the lack of English has been a real barrier to their integration into the country. Also, the lack of English has negatively influenced their ability to make friends and has also been a real obstacle to getting a job. That is why some participants say that it would be very helpful for refugees to learn English before coming to New Zealand. They suggest that learning English should be part of the previous preparation for refugees before travelling to New Zealand. This might reduce the impact that the lack of English creates in the refugees that enter the country. So, Colombian refugees encourage new refugees to have patience and to strive to learn English. One participant says:

*Finally, I recommend newcomers to have a lot of patience with the language because at first, learning the language and adapting is not easy. You need to have a lot of patience and endure until you adapt. And this takes three, four or five years; this is not overnight. Those of us who have up to eight years here are still struggling to integrate more and more, into the country. So, I recommend that you should be patient. (Participant 1).*

Another participant suggests:

*I would advise you to study English from the moment you arrive in the country. Also, to be able to get a suitable job you need to keep calm, observing and analysing the environment of this new country. Always remember that each person performs in his way and at his own pace; therefore, it is not good to compare your progress with others. Also, when you are an employee do not let anyone explode you (Participant 13).*

A Colombian refugee advice: “I would tell them (new refugees) to be very patient because learning English is not easy” (Participant 3).

#### **4.2.2 Mental health issues**

Numerous studies show that mental health issues are common among refugees not only in New Zealand but worldwide as well (Bonanno et al 2011; Darychuk & Jackson 2015; ; Kalmanowitz & Ho 2016; Kent, Davis, & Reich 2014; Lenette et al 2012; Lim & Han 2016; Liev 2008; Masten 2005; Mitschke et al 2016; Mohamed 2011; Nam et al 2016; Palacio et al 1999; Puvimanasinghe et al 2015; Riley, Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012; Sleijpen et al 2013; Slobodin & de Jong 2015; Swaroop & Deloach 2015; Tippen 2016). That is why it is not strange that Colombian refugees in New Zealand also experience this kind of issue. The most common mental health problems found among Colombian refugees in New Zealand are nostalgia, sadness and depression. For example, a Colombian woman expresses her feelings of nostalgia:

*I miss my culture; I want people here to be more open-minded. That in the afternoons people would come to sit in front of their houses and begin to greet the neighbours who pass along the street while the children play on the pathway. But here on the street where I live, I do not know the names of my neighbours, and when they pass in front of me, they pretend they do not see me and do not greet me. (Participant 2)*

Another Colombian woman expresses her sadness and depression with the following words:

*I am not happy in this country. I try to survive in this country just as I survived in Ecuador, but here I am not happy. This is a country that does not allow one to progress, here they want to have one at the lowest level, here they bring one deceived, one here has no future really, the future of one here is to be Exploited by the system until one can no longer give more. And then when one cannot give more, caregivers are told to supply medication until one die. This is the life I see in this country. (Participant 12)*

During the interview with participant number 12, she said she felt calm and comfortable with the interview. However, during the interview, she seemed very annoyed and depressed about the situation she was experiencing in New Zealand. In fact, she answered the questions loudly and angrily. According to her, her attitude was because she was very sad and upset about her living conditions in the country. For

example, she relates that since she arrived in New Zealand, she has had to face many challenges such as the lack of English, unemployment and labour and social exploitation of the system. She also said that at her place of employment she was discriminated against by her co-workers. All this situation made her not feel glad in New Zealand. Also, she wanted to be able to return to Colombia because according to her in New Zealand there is no future for refugees.

Other Colombian refugees claim to have had moments of great sadness when they have shed tears, either because they miss their country of origin, or simply because they have traumatic memories of the war experienced in Colombia. All these claims about the mental health issues encounter by Colombian refugees in New Zealand are in line with other research that has been done on the mental health of refugees (Bonanno et al 2011; Darychuk & Jackson 2015; ; Kalmanowitz & Ho 2016; Kent, Davis, & Reich 2014; Lenette et al 2012; Lim & Han 2016; Liev 2008; Masten 2005; Mitschke et al 2016; Mohamed 2011; Nam et al 2016; Palacio et al 1999; Puvimanasinghe et al 2015; Riley, Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani 2012; Sleijpen et al 2013; Slobodin & de Jong 2015; Swaroop & Deloach 2015; Tippen 2016).

#### 4.2.3 Discrimination

Discrimination is another of the challenges that refugees deal with, in New Zealand (Beaglehole 1988; Butcher et al., 2006; Department of Labour 2004; Ministry of Social Development 2008; Revell 2012; Treen 2013; Yor 2016). One participant, for example, says that she has faced a lot of discrimination in New Zealand to be a refugee. She says:

*I remember one time a Kiwi guy said to me: "You refugees never change, no matter how you begin to work or study, you will always be refugees. You will never be able to get ahead, you in your mind will never be able to overcome your traumas and problems and therefore you will never go forward or cease to be refugees". The words that that person said surprised me a lot, so I asked him to repeat what he had said because I thought maybe I had understood incorrectly, but he repeated me the same words. He returned to tell me that all the traumas that we, as refugees, bring with us do not allow us to change and move forward, and much less to overcome. (...) I think that this man is not right. Besides, getting ahead depends on each person. We fought hard in Colombia, escaped from Colombia and did not lose our lives, I also fought hard in Ecuador not to let myself starve, and with all those difficulties I was able to get ahead. And here in New Zealand, I keep fighting. So, all that struggle to go ahead and -adapt to every country where I have lived is proof that we can overcome obstacles and get ahead. (...) I have also seen many documentaries, where many immigrants who do not speak English very well get jobs in other English-speaking countries such as the United States and even Australia. In these documentaries, people say that although their English is not good, they have several jobs. So, here in New Zealand, such discrimination exists that if a person does not speak perfect English, you are not an intelligent person and do not get employment. That is a form of discrimination that has affected me very much (Participant 2)*

This participant has coped with discrimination associated with her refugee status in New Zealand. According to her, the simple fact of being a refugee already makes her an object of discrimination. Most

of the participants in this study agree with the words of this Colombian woman. In fact, another refugee woman affirms that the same Colombian immigrants see the Colombian refugees as inferior persons. Other participants claim that they have also been discriminated against because they are Colombians. For example, a young Colombian refugee says that some colleagues in his work believe that he uses cocaine because, according to his colleagues, all Colombians are drug addicts. For the most part, these findings are consistent with other research that has been conducted in New Zealand, which indicate that discrimination against refugees in New Zealand is one of the challenges these people encounter (Beaglehole 1988; Butcher et al., 2006; Department of Labour 2004; Ministry of Social Development 2008; Revell 2012; Treen 2013; Yor 2016).

#### **4.2.4 Unemployment**

Unemployment is another challenge faced by refugees in New Zealand and most countries (Crea, Loughry, O'Halloran, & Flannery 2016; Department of Labour 2004; Feeney 2000; Frost 2015; Lyon, Sepulveda & Syrett 2007; Ministry of Social Development 2008; Pahud 2008; Phillimore & Goodso, 2006; Tomlinson & Egan 2002; Yor 2016). Participants in this study say that unemployment is one of the biggest challenges that refugees experience in New Zealand. According to the research carried out by the Ministry of Social Development (2008), many refugees do not get a job in New Zealand because they do not speak fluent English with a Kiwi accent; the same research reveals that the lack of work experience in New Zealand is also a barrier to being hired and getting a job in New Zealand. The lack of qualification is another obstacle to get a job in New Zealand. The findings of this research agree with the research of the Ministry of Social Development (2008), for example, Colombian refugees say that due to the lack of advanced English they are unable to get a job in New Zealand. However, some Colombian refugees have gained work experience in New Zealand working as volunteers or simply by doing any job to acquire work experience, but they still cannot get a job that allows them to be self-sufficient. Therefore, the vast majority of Colombian refugees continue depending on social welfare provided by the government.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 MANIFESTING RESILIENCE IN THEIR LIVING IN NEW ZEALAND**

It could be said that despite the challenges faced by the Colombian refugees in New Zealand, they have been capable of adapting and integrating into the community. In other words, Colombian refugees have rebuilt their lives in New Zealand, they have had to overcome their traumas from the past, to achieve this. Additionally, they have been willing to cope with the challenges they face in their daily life in the country. As shown above, Colombian refugees in New Zealand have been able to move forward thanks

to the development of resilience. The attitude of Colombian refugees to the challenges already examined in this research shows their resilience.

It is evident that the lack of English is a very big challenge for refugees in New Zealand, even though, the Colombian refugees have not allowed the lack of English to intimidate them and prevent them from continuing to lead a normal life in New Zealand. To emphasize, a 60-year-old Colombian refugee affirms that his lack of advanced English has not been an obstacle to being able to have Kiwi friends and socialize with them; also, this Colombian refugee claims to have had 15 Kiwis girlfriends in Hamilton. Similarly, other Colombian refugees think that the lack of English is not an obstacle to being able to work and communicate with other people in New Zealand. It could be said then that the aforementioned stories of Colombian refugees in New Zealand, are examples of resilience display by them.

Although dealing with mental health problems is also a challenge for Colombian refugees during their resettlement in New Zealand, they have been able to take a firm stance on these problems. There is no denying the fact that some of them still feel moments of sadness and even depression, but even so, they have been willing to continue rebuilding their lives in this country. In fact, they are very glad to live in New Zealand, the words of one of these refugees demonstrate this:

*"I learned to love this country because the truth is that this is a country that has given us many aids. This is a country that has welcomed us from that sadness that we felt like abandoned children and welcomed us giving us warmth like a mother, that's how I feel here".* Another refugee states: *"I love New Zealand because this country has been a blessing to my family and me. That's why I feel a great love for New Zealand".* Another refugee, while acknowledging that there are flaws in refugee aid, says that he still feels love for New Zealand:

*I have learned to love New Zealand and although at first, it was very hard ... very hard and many times I was baffled, today I feel that I love it very much and I have learned to love it. Because this is a very good and generous country. I have much to thank the country and I want to contribute more to this country. But government assistance is needed to help the refugees to integrate better in the country so that they can contribute more to the country and not only be living on the benefit of the government. But the government is required to do better social programs to achieve this goal. (Participant 1)*

It could be said that the fact that Colombian refugees feel happy living in New Zealand despite all the challenges already examined, is evidence of the resilience manifested by Colombian refugees in the resettlement and integration process in New Zealand.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This study explores how resilience is manifested by Colombian refugees in their resettlement and integration process in New Zealand. For this purpose, this investigation counted on the participation of 13 former Colombian refugees who were resettled in New Zealand from Ecuador, where they used to live as refugees. This study has contributed to new knowledge about Colombian refugees in New Zealand. As

previously described, the lack of academic research on Colombian refugees in New Zealand was one of the main reasons for this investigation, and this study makes an original contribution to fills the gap in the literature on this topic.

The findings show that Colombian refugees in New Zealand are facing many challenges that put at risk their integration into the country. The main challenges faced by Colombian refugees in New Zealand are the lack of English, mental health issues, discrimination and unemployment. These findings concord with other research findings in New Zealand (Crea, Loughry, O'Halloran, & Flannery 2016; Department of Labour 2004; Feeney 2000; Frost 2015; Lyon, Sepulveda & Syrett 2007; Ministry of Social Development 2008; Pahud 2008; Phillimore & Goodso, 2006; Tomlinson & Egan 2002; Yor 2016). However, it can be seen that despite all the challenges that Colombian refugees face in New Zealand, they have been able to rebuild their lives in New Zealand. In fact, they feel very happy to live in this country. Besides, they claim to feel love for New Zealand and have not allowed the aforementioned obstacles to interfere with the performance of their daily activities in New Zealand. Therefore, it could be said that Colombian refugees in New Zealand are demonstrating resilience in their daily lives.

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