

Chapter 3

Religion and Spirituality Empowering Female Refugee Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Female refugees face additional challenges and obstacles on their path to entrepreneurship. This can be explained by intersectionality, taking into account compounded discrimination due to gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and also religion. While conservative religious values and norms tend to be portrayed in a negative light, as hindering female leadership and fostering patriarchal views, this chapter assesses the positive impact that religion and spirituality may have for women refugee entrepreneurs. From the perspective of social psychology, it also considers how a comprehensive and creative training for female entrepreneurs should account for the demand-side, supply-side, soft skills, mental health, and religion and spirituality, preceded by a sound analysis of the context.

INTRODUCTION

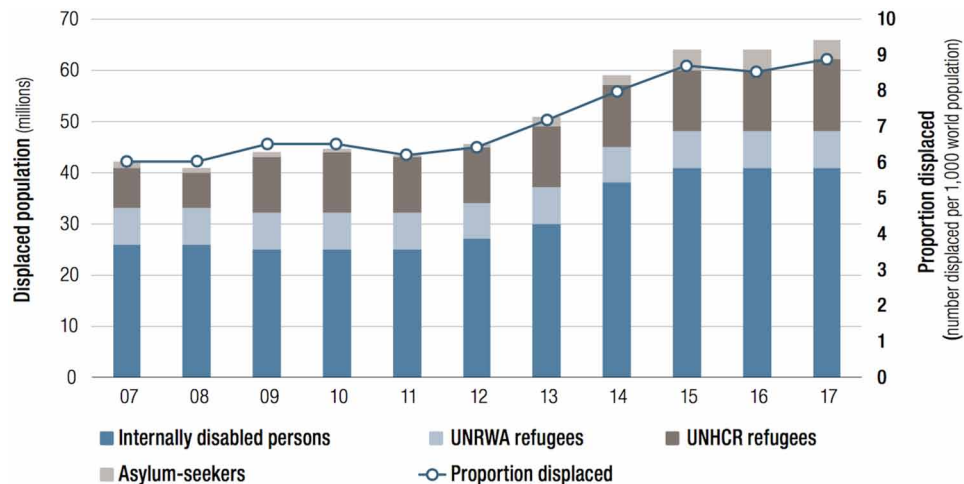
Much attention has been dedicated to the topic of refugees in the media, politics, and other areas. In Europe, since many years, the idea of a ‘refugee crisis’ permeates public discourse and news headlines. However, the phenomenon is not new and for many years various societies have hosted a number of people forced to leave their country of origin, searching for safety and fulfillment of other basic needs. They constitute approximately 1% of the world’s population of international immigrants, amounting to over 68 million people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018) – vide Figure 1.

Women account for approximately half of the forced migrants worldwide. Without doubt, forced immigration is an extremely stressful event filled with traumatic experiences. Refugees develop different coping strategies, based on their multiple identities including gender, ethnicity, education, and religion, among other characteristics. Moreover, the social and cultural context plays a crucial role for the successful integration in new societies and ability to overcome trauma.

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Figure 1. Trend of global displacement and proportion displaced 2007-2017

Source: UNHCR (2018)



Becoming an entrepreneur is a universal marker of success in individualistic societies in countries of resettlement and asylum in Europe, North America, and Australia. According to Mehtap, Ozmenekse, and Caputo (2019), it is well documented that more men than women engage in entrepreneurial activity and that female entrepreneurs are often at a disadvantage and face more challenges when compared with their male counterparts.

Thus, a female refugee who manages to establish and run a small business can be easily seen as a success story. What does it take to be transformed from an individual in need to an entrepreneur? Agency, luck, empowerment, social support? Within this complex scenario of change, religion and spirituality should be taken into account alongside other factors. In fact, spirituality plays a major role in entrepreneurial cognition, especially in relation to risk taking, uncertainty, and finding one's path (Ganzin, Islam, & Suddaby, 2020).

This chapter looks specifically at the role of religion and spirituality in the empowerment of female refugee entrepreneurship. It fills the gap in the literature, which so far has mostly featured immigrants' religiosity in general (Rowatt, 2019), and in particular refugees' conversion experiences (Kéri & Sleiman, 2017) and religious coping with loss (McLellan, 2015; Shaw et al., 2019); response of the churches to the 'refugee crisis' (Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018; Janzen, Stobbe, Chapman, & Watson, 2016); religious orientation and commitment in prejudicial attitudes towards refugees among receiving societies (Carlson et al., 2019; Deslandes & Anderson, 2019; Mancini, Bottura, & Caricati, 2018).

BACKGROUND

Female refugee entrepreneurship in large part depends on social norms, especially when it comes to the freedom of choice to get involved in economic ventures outside of the household (Ritchie, 2018). In many cultures, women's access to markets and resources is very limited, due to the norms that prescribe their activities within the realms of home and family. However, in the fragile settings such as refugee environments, marked by the need to survive above all else (providing food and shelter), traditional gender roles

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