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GENDERED INTEGRATION?

Experiences of women who have migrated from the Global South to Finland

ABSTRACT

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This is a qualitative study about women's integration. The aim of the study was to find out how women experience their integration processes and what kind of supporting factors and barriers could be identified. The data was collected by interviewing 10 women who have migrated from the Global South to Finland. Seven individual interviews and one group interview were conducted. The study was conducted in cooperation with MLL Tampere department.

Integration is often seen as a question of employment and learning the language, but it is more multidimensional than that. It is a socially constructed process, and it includes the receiving society's practices, policies, and ability to adapt. Public discussion on migration and integration is also tightly connected to global events and political debates, and the discussion is directly linked to gender as well. Differences between nationalities and ethnic groups are viewed through the lenses of gender. On the other hand, some gender-specific challenges have been linked to women's integration in Finland, and it is fair to say that migrant women have untapped integration potential.

The interviews and analysis of the thesis were structured by Heckmann's theory of integration (2006). It formed a multidimensional framework for organizing the data, since it divides social integration into structural, cultural, interactive, and identificative integration. According to the findings of the study, more emphasis on interactive and identificative integration are needed. Integration does not happen in a vacuum, and social networks and support from the loved ones are crucially important. Some gender-specific vulnerabilities could be identified, and the role of social support was emphasized in dealing with those vulnerabilities. On the other hand, lack of support as well as different forms of racism were identified as barriers to integration.

When integration is discussed, the focus is often on representation instead of identity. Inclusiveness and communality of the receiving society could support the migrants and strengthen the feeling of belonging.

Keywords: integration, migrant women, gender

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the public and political debate in Finland, migration and integration are often narrowed down to a question of employment, and because the unemployment rate of migrant women, especially migrant women from the Global South, is relatively high, there is an emphasis on it. (EMN Finland 2022, pp. 9-11.) For example, in 2018, weak integration of migrant women in Finland was underlined by an OECD report (EMN Finland 2022, p.11), and now the Finnish Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (hereafter the Integration Act), which is currently under reform, stresses immigrant women's employment, among other things (kotoutuminen.fi n.d.). At the same time, the percentage of highly educated migrant women in Finland is high, and migrant women's language skills are extensive due to, for example, their multi-location histories and family backgrounds. Thus, it is fair to say that migrant women have integration potential that remains untapped. (EMN Finland 2022, pp. 7-8.)

The high unemployment rate can be linked to, for example, reasons for migration, cultural factors, and gendered labor market. According to gender-specific statistics from 2019-2021, the most common reason for the women from the Global South to migrate to Finland is family, and employment might not be a rational alternative for many migrant mothers who are in weak labor market positions to begin with. It has also been acknowledged that unemployment is reflected on social networks and the other way around, and weak social networks can cause for example loneliness and thus make integration harder. (EMN Finland 2022, pp. 6, 10-11.) Different scholars have used the term '*double disadvantage*' which refers to the combined negative impact of gender and birthplace (Grubanov-Boskovic, Tintori & Biagi 2020, p.15).

On the other hand, public discussion on migration and integration is tightly connected to global events and political debates. For example, 9/11 terrorist attack in the US in 2001 was a radical turning point for the public discussion. The attack made far-right politicians louder, increased racism and islamophobia and

brought assimilation to the center of discussion on integration in Europe as well. Similarly, this discussion is directly linked to gender, and we view the differences between nationalities and ethnic groups through the lenses of gender. (Keskinen & Vuori 2012, pp. 8, 20-21.)

A recent example of this in Finland is from a month prior to writing this introduction. In July 2023, Finland's finance minister, Riikka Purra, was condemned for her blog comments from 2019. She had stated (Yle's translation from Finnish), presumably referring to Muslim women wearing burqas: "There are unidentifiable black sacks walking around the capital region who can only be identified as people because they are usually dragging small people behind them." (Yle 2023.) This was condemned, among many, by 26 Muslim groups and organizations and a researcher Malin Grahn-Wilder who called the statement dehumanizing and thus harmful and dangerous (Paukkeri 2023; Yle 2023).

It is often forgotten that integration includes the receiving society adapting to the changing circumstances (Saukkonen 2020a, p. 25). When we talk about integration, the focus is often on representation: how do the host societies view the newcomers? For example, the refugees are seen contradictorily as threats and outsiders but also as people in need, fleeing conflicts. That undoubtedly affects the acculturation processes. Therefore, questions of identity should be brought to the center of discussion. Entering a new society is a difficult task, and depending on how the immigrants view their position and possibilities in the new society, they make decisions about their integration. (Lienen & LeRoux-Rutledge 2022, pp.1-2.)

Considering all the complexities and interlocking systems affecting migrant women, I am interested in migrant women's own stories and experiences, their personal journeys, and the different dimensions of integration. I would also like to see the focus being shifted from representation to questions of identity. That is the way to find out, how the receiving societies can help the migrants feel welcomed and supported.

1.1 The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out how women view their integration processes when using a holistic approach to integration. I am interested in the stories of women who have migrated to Finland from the Global South and have lived here for at least four years. The current research questions are:

1) How do women experience their own integration processes?
2) What kind of support has benefited the women's integration?
3) What kind of barriers to integration can be identified?

This is a qualitative study, and I interviewed ten (10) migrant women living in Tampere area. I conducted seven individual interviews and one group interview with three participants. The interviews were structured using Friedrich Heckmann's (2006) theory of integration. Heckmann's theory on integration is multidimensional, and it forms the framework for the interview questions and problem formulation.

I found the interviewees through my work as a coordinator of multicultural work at The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) Tampere department. My work focuses on women's social integration, and my main task is to coordinate a program called Friend for an Immigrant Mum. The thesis was written in cooperation with my workplace.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

Almost half of the world's migrants are women and girls, and women are also increasingly migrating as heads of their households or alone. This represents an opportunity for economic independence and empowerment. On the other hand, migrant women face major risks such as exploitation, abuse, and discrimination. Women are also more likely than men to face health problems both in transit and at the destination, and health care services are not always accessible. (United Nations Population Fund, 2018.)

In this chapter, I aim at explaining how multidimensional integration is, and how gender plays a role in integration.

2.1 Integration as a process

In Finland, integration is defined by the Integration Act (1386/2010) which aims at making it easier for "immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society". It also aims at gender-equality, non-discrimination, and social cohesion. In the Act integration is defined as interactive development which involves the immigrant and society at large. The aim is to provide immigrants with skills and knowledge needed in the society and working life, and to support the immigrants in maintaining their culture and language. Integration also means services provided by authorities and other parties. The Act also stresses social empowerment and multi-sectoral cooperation. (Finlex, 2010.) The Integration Act is currently under reform, and the new Act will enter into force in January 2025.

In academic research, integration is viewed more holistically. Integration can be considered the whole process in which the immigrant finds his or her place in the society, and at the same time as a certain kind of development during which the migrant adjusts to the new home country and its customs (Saukkonen, 2013, p. 65). There can also be seen a lot of similarities in the definitions of integration and wellbeing: both consist of capabilities that are constructed in relation to other people and society (Sotkasiira, 2018, pp. 32-33).

Jaana Vuori has introduced a notion of *everyday citizenship.* According to Vuori (2012, p. 235), integration is a process with no clear beginning or end, but it is a construction of everyday citizenship which includes having enough knowledge about the society and its practices, culture, and language to cope in everyday life. It is a two-way process constructed in relation with the society, and it has both institutional and symbolic dimensions. The construction of everyday citizenship includes rights and responsibilities, participation, and inclusion as well as the sense of belonging.

Vuori (2015, pp. 398-402) has also divided integrative work into seven practical dimensions: 1) guidance and passing of information, 2) psychosocial support, 3) sharing knowledge on social rights, 4) language support, 5) physical care, 6) enabling cultural encounters, and 7) advocacy.

For data collection purposes of this study, I am using Friedrich Heckmann's theory of integration. Heckmann divides social integration into six dimensions which will be introduced in the next sub-chapter. The core idea behind the categorization is that social integration is a long-lasting process involving both the migrant and the receiving society. (Heckmann 2006, pp. 18, 24-25.) The theory – or framework, if you will – is multidimensional which is why I chose to use it to structure the interviews. I altered the categorization slightly for the purposes of data collection. I will write more about this in chapter 3.

2.2 Heckmann on social integration

Friedrich Heckmann, the director of European Forum for Migration Studies, and his Integration and Integration Policies (INTPOL) team have developed a framework for integration research. The main areas of integration research have been identified as a) migrants' social integration into the institutions of receiving societies, b) the impacts of social integration for the social structure, and c) the societal integration of the receiving societies (Heckmann 2006, p.24). This study focuses on the personal and individual experiences of migrant women. Therefore, the focus is on social integration. It can be defined as:

> *"a generations lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society. For the migrants integration refers to a process of learning a new culture, an acquisition of rights, access to positions and statuses, a building of personal relations to members of the receiving society and a formation of feelings of belonging and identification towards the immigration society."*

Table 1. Social integration divided into six dimensions:

structural integration
• economy: labour market, ethnic entrepreneurship
• education and vocational/professional training
• citizenship
• housing
• policies of structural integration

cultural integration
• language competences
• values, norms
• role models, for instance gender roles
• religion
• mutual acculturation: change of culture of receiving society
• policies of cultural integration

interactive integration
• friendships
• marriages, partnerships
• membership in private organizations of receiving society

identificative integration
• subjective feeling of belonging to collectivities
• identificational policies of immigration country

integration as a learning and socialization process
• cultural and social capital of migrating family as condition
• length of stay and integration
• generation and integration
• country of origin and integration
• integration support policies

barriers to social integration
• institutional discrimination
• prejudice and discrimination
• discrimination or human capital?
• combating prejudice and discrimination

Source: Heckmann 2006, pp. 24-25

In the table above, social integration has been divided into six dimensions. I have used this categorization as a framework for the interviews, but I have altered it

slightly for the purposes of this study (see chapter 3). Heckmann's theory of integration is a multidimensional and holistic, and it is relevant framework for integration research purposes. Undoubtedly, however, new themes were to emerge when the focus was on women's integration.

2.3 Gender and integration

As I wrote in the introduction, there has been a great focus on migrant women's (especially women from the Global South) low employment rate in Finland in the past few years. The percentage of highly educated migrant women in Finland is high, and migrant women's language skills are extensive due to, for example, their multi-location histories and family backgrounds, but the employment rate remains low. Therefore, it is fair to say that migrant women have integration potential that remains untapped. (EMN Finland 2022, pp. 7-8.)

The high unemployment rate can be linked to, for example, reasons for migration, cultural factors, and gendered labor market. According to gender-specific statistics from 2019-2021, the most common reason for the women from the Global South to migrate to Finland is family, and employment might not be a rational alternative for many migrant mothers who are in weak labor market positions to begin with. It has also been acknowledged that unemployment is reflected on social networks and the other way around, and weak social networks can cause for example loneliness and thus make integration harder. (EMN Finland 2022, pp. 6, 10-11.)

There are certain terms that are used in integration research to underline the role of gender. One of the terms is '*double disadvantage'*, which refers to the combined negative impact of gender and birthplace. Another relevant term is '*motherhood penalty'* which refers to the negative relationship between motherhood and women's labor market outcomes. A third term which can be mentioned is '*family location effect'* which refers to couples prioritizing husbands' career prospects when deciding where to migrate or live. (Grubanov-Boskovic et al. 2020, pp. 14-15.)

On the other hand, as I wrote in the introduction, public discussion on migration and integration is tightly connected to global events and political debates. For example, terrorist attacks can make far-right politicians louder, increase racism and islamophobia and thus create a paradigm shift on public discussion on integration. Similarly, this discussion is directly linked to gender, and we view the differences between nationalities and ethnic groups through the lenses of gender. (Keskinen & Vuori 2012, pp. 8, 20-21.) This affects us at a national and local level as well.

Conceptions of gender and integration are constantly changing in a multicultural society, but integration remains gendered. Women often have a central role in our notions of ethnic or national communities. For example, the use of hijab, a traditional head scarf worn by Muslim women, has been actively discussed in many European countries for years now. Women's bodies and clothing have become tools in defining national identity, belonging and exclusion. Issues and choices that have been considered private, have become public. (Keskinen 2021, pp. 215-216; Keskinen & Vuori 2012, pp. 8-9, 14-15.) In the introduction, I used one of our ministers' online comments about Muslim women as "black sacks" as a classic example of not just excluding migrant women but dehumanizing them.

This has been widely criticized by many scholars. For example, Vuori (2012, pp. 260-262) has criticized the way women's challenges are often linked to ethnicity, how problems are being individualized without taking inadequate or dysfunctional policies and practices, discrimination, or racism into consideration, and how employment is emphasized even when we talk about vulnerable groups. Several scholars in the Nordic region (eg. Keskinen 2021, pp. 201-203, 218) call for antiracist feminism that is built into everyday struggles.

Intersectionality has proven to be an important analytical tool in understanding the complex situations of migrant women (Grubanov-Boskovic et al. 2020, p.32), but it should also be implemented in practice in the pursuit of social justice by for example removing the white normativities and racial hierarchies (Keskinen 2021, pp. 207-208; Stoltz 2021, p. 39).

2.4 Identity, integration, and the future

As I wrote in the introduction, discussion on integration is often focused on representation: how do the receiving societies view the migrants? However, questions of identity are equally important and should be brought to the center of discussion. Entering a new society is a difficult task, and depending on how the immigrants view their position and possibilities in the new society, they make decisions about their integration. (Lienen & LeRoux-Rutledge 2022, pp.1-2; Kunst et al. 2016, pp. 251, 255-256.)

Although we know integration is two-sided, it is often forgotten that integration includes the receiving society adapting to the changing circumstances. Questions of migration and integration should be viewed as neutrally as possible, without fascism and racism. The debate over integration wavers between maintaining everything as it is and giving everything up, but we should focus on building new national identities and traditions to simultaneously exist with the older ones. (Saukkonen 2020a, pp. 24-26). Saukkonen (2020b, pp.201-202) describes this as the *flexibility of cultures*.

In the past two decades, the definition of *being a Finn* has been in a transformation process. For example, the existence of national minorities has been acknowledged better. At the same time, as I wrote earlier, nationalism and racism have increased. The neo-nationalist movement has arrived in Finland as well, and it opposes broader definitions of *Finnishness*. However, to support immigrants in integrating into the new society, broader definition of being a Finn is exactly what is needed. Finnishness should be constructed in a way that anyone, despite their background, skin color, religion, or language, could identify with it. (Saukkonen 2020b, pp. 201-202.) But how do we do this? Who is "Finnish" enough? Makweri (2020, pp. 49-50) ponders on this and points out that it is not just a question of immigrants but for example racialized Finns, POC (people of color) etc. We have already identified the people and groups who are at the center of this discussion, but we are still objectifying them, and their voices are not heard. In addition, racism – which is a multilayered phenomenon including racial discrimination, labeling, othering, and exotism – is partially rooted in the same

false and narrow notion of Finnishness being ethnically and "racially" homogeneous (Keskinen et al. 2021, pp.56-57; Makweri 2020, pp. 52-53; Seikkula & Hortelano 2021, pp. 147-156). I will write more about this in chapter 5.3.

Processes in which we find ways to uphold unity are required. This is done through intercultural interaction and dialogue. This does not mean that the discussions and negotiations are always easy, but excluding or othering migrants will not lead anywhere. Instead, we will need to accept global migration as a norm in order for societies to find purposeful ways to regulate it and combine diversity and unity (Saukkonen 2020a, pp. 24-27).

This is, for obvious reasons, important from both individual and society's perspective. Heckmann (2006, pp. 24-25) talks about identificative integration which refers to both subjective *feeling of belonging* and the identificational policies of the receiving country. It is important how the society is structured socially, and how it is shaped and affected by social integration. Saukkonen (2020a, p. 72) also states that identification is not given, and when it fails, the outcome is immigrants who identify only with the country of origin and are marginalized.

As I previously wrote, gender plays a big role in the battle between identity and representation. That is why antiracist feminist platforms are needed. In the feminist orientation of those who are racialized as "others", feminism cannot be separated from antiracism. Future feminism needs to tackle the differences and inequalities in resources and power, and in doing so, it has all the potential to form a steppingstone for broader social justice movements. (Keskinen 2021, p.211-218.)

3 RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will describe the research environment, methodology, and the way in which I used Heckmann's theory of integration in structuring the interviews and the analysis.

3.1 Research environment

The research was conducted in cooperation with my workplace, The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL) Tampere department, where I work as a coordinator of multicultural work. I have been working in the current position for almost four years. My work focuses on women's social integration. My main task is to coordinate a program called Friend for an Immigrant Mum where immigrant women and volunteer Finnish speaking women are matched to become friends. In addition, we have activities such as events for the women who participate in the program. Thus, the informants of the research are women I know through work, in one way or another. MLL Tampere department has coordinated Friend for an Immigrant Mum program since 2012 (STEA-funded since 2017), so the program has reached hundreds of women.

3.2 Data collection

This is a qualitative study. The data was collected by individual in-depth interviews and a group interview. I found the interviewees by making a post in a closed Facebook group and by writing about my thesis process in a newsletter. I also asked some of the participants personally.

The idea of collecting data using both individual and group interviews was to see whether the latter provides opportunities for the women to support each other in sharing their stories and thus produce new perspectives, and it did. Integration is a sensitive topic, but in choosing the group interview participants carefully, the discussions might produce more versatile data and interesting themes for analysis.

As I wrote in previous chapter, the interviews were structured based on Friedrich Heckmann's theory of integration (2006). Heckmann divides social integration into six dimensions which I have reconstructed slightly in structuring the interviews. The interview questions in both Finnish and English can be found in appendix 1. The latter two dimensions of Heckmann's categorization, "*integration as a learning and socialization process*" and *"barriers to social integration"* are renamed or fused with the other categories. This is how I restructured the theory for the purposes of the data collection:

1) **Background information (Heckmann: integration as a learning and socialization process)**
   For example, country of origin and age, migration process, current life situation, social capital

2) **Structural integration**
   For example, studies and employment, services the informant has received, housing

3) **Cultural integration**
   For example, language skills, values and norms, religion

4) **Interactive integration**
   For example, friendships, marriages and partnerships, memberships

5) **Identificative integration & barriers**
   For example, feeling of belonging, discrimination

Barriers to social integration will naturally be a part of the analysis process and conclusions, but I did not use it as an interview theme, since it is a theme that emerges connected to other questions.

3.3 Interviews and the interviewees

I interviewed ten women between April 17th and June 22nd, 2023. I conducted seven individual interviews and one group interview with three women participating in it. Four of the interviews were conducted in Finnish and four, including the group interview, in English. The interviews were recorded with an

audio recorder and transcribed word-for-word. The length average of the individual interviews was 57 minutes with the shortest interview lasting for 32 minutes and the longest lasting for 1 hour 29 minutes. The group interview lasted for 1 hour 50 minutes. When the interviews were transcribed, it formed approximately 87 two-column A4 pages of data with Calibri font style, the font size being 11 and line spacing 1,5.

I wanted to interview women who have migrated from the Global South and have lived in Finland for at least four years. I wanted to interview women from the Global South because I was interested in the possible intersectionalities that might emerge from the stories of women who have migrated from countries that are economically, culturally, and socially different from Finland. The interviewees came from nine different countries in Southeast- and South Asia, Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa. One of the countries is not officially a Global South country but it is a Middle Eastern country. Individual countries are not mentioned to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. All the group interview participants came from different countries.

The interviewees were from 25 to 44 years old (some of the group interview participants did not want to specify their age but said it is "approximately the same" as others). Nine out of the ten interviewees had moved to Finland between 2013 and 2019, and one of the interviewees had lived in Finland for more than 15 years. The reasons for migrating to Finland varied: most of the interviewees had moved to Finland because of their spouse / together with their spouse (either Finnish or from the same country of origin as they were) or through family reunification, one moved as an asylum seeker, one as a quota refugee, and one because of work. At the time of arrival, five of the interviewees were academically educated, three had a vocational education, and two didn't have any education (with a very limited access to school before migrating). Eight of the interviewees have children and two don't. The group was heterogeneous, and you cannot draw conclusions for example between the reasons for migrating and the educational levels.

The findings are reported in a way that the interviewees cannot be recognized. For example, countries of origin are not mentioned. The interviewees are numbered: *interviewee 1, interviewee 2* etc. Interviewees 6-8 are group interview participants.

3.4 Data analysis

The structure of the interviews forms a natural foundation for my analysis: the theory I have structured the interview questions with is the foundation of my analysis structure. I have used a *directed content analysis* method which means that there is an existing theory about the phenomenon I study, but it might benefit from further description or new perspectives might emerge (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p.1281). This means that initial coding was quite simple, but the importance lies in what new perspectives arise. In that sense, every qualitative data analysis is thematic to a degree: researcher submits herself to emerging patterns and then deals with *"the complexities of realities"* that go beyond the initial research design (Holliday 2007, p.93).

In directed content analysis, the data can be coded with one of two strategies. One of them is to identify and categorize every instance of the studied phenomenon, and the other strategy is to start coding with predetermined codes and see if the data produces sub-categories. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, pp.1281-1282.) I was leaning on the latter, because Heckmann's theory is multidimensional and holistic, so I believe in the categorization I have structured the interviews with. You can find the framework for interviews and coding in subchapter 3.2.

My thesis is about women's integration, and I was interested in any gender-specific themes, topics, and phenomena the informants would raise. What are these themes, and how do they affect the women's lives and integration processes? When I started collecting data, it soon realized that there are gender-specific taboos, stigma, and vulnerabilities. How does this affect the women and their integration? This affected the coding and analysis process, and new sub-categories emerged.

4 ETHICS AND RELIABILITY

This is a qualitative study, and the epistemological stand in qualitative research is interpretivist. Emphasis is on understanding the social world by studying how its 'participants' interpret it. (Bryman 2008, p. 366.) Thus, this study is not about verifying facts but about finding out how women experience and view their integration processes.

As I mentioned in chapter 3, the idea of collecting data using both individual and group interviews was to see whether the latter provides opportunities for the women to support each other in sharing their stories and thus produce new perspectives. At its best, group facilitation as a data collection method can empower the participants and enable peer-support and -education (Vanner et al. 2022, pp.236-237), but it requires time – which I had a limited amount of. That is why forming the group for the group interview was a challenge. Integration is a sensitive topic which had to be taken into consideration in choosing the participants. However, the small group of three participants turned out to be good. The dialogue was fruitful, and the interviewees supported each other, commented on each other's experiences, and used that to take the conversation to new levels. Unfortunately, one the group interview participants had to leave in the halfway of the interview. Despite this, I analyzed the data normally, and whenever it is relevant in reporting the findings, it will be mentioned, how many interviewees I am referring to, for example x out of 9 or x out of 10 interviewees.

The participants of the research were women I know through work. Knowing the research setting was both an asset and a challenge. The research design process felt natural, and familiarity and mutual trust had already been established before the data collection. In that sense, my dual role (as both a researcher and a coordinator of MLL Tampere department), felt beneficial: because I was personally attached to the research setting, I was open to the participants' perspectives, I felt deep sense of accountability, and wanted to analyze any possible power dynamics. I wanted the data collection process to have a transparent foundation which is important if we want to talk about an ethically conducted research (Goddard-Durant et al. 2022, pp. 26-27).

On the other hand, knowing the informants also causes ongoing objectivity considerations. I had to reflect my input in each interview and the group discussion situation. However, that should be done whenever conducting a qualitative research, even though total objectivity is impossible. Holliday uses a term *culture of dealing* in describing the complex relationship between the researcher and the informants: both parties have the potential to negotiate the research event (Holliday 2007, p. 140).

Anonymity was another challenge in dealing with the data of this study. Knowing the interviewees helped create a safe space, and many of the interviewees shared sensitive and detailed occurrences and emotions to do with their integration processes. This meant I had to pay extra attention to how the data was stored, analyzed, and reported. Quotations were especially challenging: there is a lot of them because I wanted to make sure the interviewees' voices are heard, but the quotations have been added to the text bearing anonymity in mind. Securing anonymity and privacy is not an easy task in qualitative research but it is important to report the findings in a way that individuals cannot be identified (Bryman 2008, p. 119). In this case, we are talking about immigrant women who live in Tampere area and are connected to MLL Tampere department's friendship program. This means they could easily be identified, and many details (such as countries of origin) were left out.

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK has defined what is to be ethically reviewed when conducting human sciences research. The guidelines include analyzing potential risks, informing the participants about the purpose and content of the research, getting consents, having a data management plan, and analyzing the significance of new information in relation to potential harm or risks. (TENK 2019, p.18.) I received a research permit from MLL Tampere department. I told the informants about my role as a researcher, and I gave them an information letter (appendix 2). The informants signed an interview consent (individual interview consent form as an example, appendix 3), and the group interview participants committed to confidentiality. After the thesis is published, all the collected data will be destroyed.

5 FINDINGS

The findings were structured according to Heckmann's theory of integration (2006) the same way the interview questions were structured. It formed a natural foundation for the sampling, although new themes and thus new sub-chapters emerged. The most important thing in reporting the findings was to let the interviewees' voices be heard, which is why narrative elements are used in this chapter.

5.1 Structural integration

Most of the interviewees described that the early stages of settling down in Finland went smoothly. This included the resident permit process, integration course / language studies or work. Three of the interviewees felt the Finnish course / integration program helped in getting to know Finnish culture and customs, and four of the interviewees described how their employer and / or colleagues had played an important role in supporting them in settling down or even learning the language.

> *But I've been very fortunate to have colleagues who were very encouraging and non-discriminative because I think it's so important, especially when you're sort of minority, because we can just close our eyes and pretend like we're blind but we're not. But anyways… But it's it's.. it's really been amazing journey for me. But where I currently work now, my boss actually offered me the job on the first day of my trainee, so I was like: what?! (Interviewee 8)*

> *And I was sure I would have to.. It will be so hard for me to get a job here, because my language level was zero. When I started, and I was so sure, like, I would have to get to professional level but it was not true. Like, I just learned for one year and it was kind of… I got lucky too. My boss, when he hired me, he was, he wanted to check for two weeks if I can manage with my language level. Can I manage to do the work or not? And my mentor, she was given to look after me. She was also helpful and then she tried to encourage me, even at the work… When the boss asked, like, how is it going, and then she just told like: "Her language is very basic but at least it doesn't affect, whatever our work, she do it easily. She gets it, like, what we have to do. (…) I recently got the certificate of B2 level. Like, as I said, here in Finland they have very good facilities. My company*

helped to have one hour or two hours twice a week in my office. Like the teacher was coming there… (Interviewee 6)

Eight of the ten interviewees stated they are happy or satisfied with their current study- or employment situation. Many of the interviewees also mentioned other services that have supported their integration or their families' integration. For example, the accessibility of health care services and education, maternal health clinic (neuvola) and its psychologist, social work, and women's shelter were appreciated. Some of the interviewees had also really appreciated their teachers either at language course or at vocational studies.

Four of the interviewees, however, described challenges or negative impacts of bureaucracy. Interviewee 3 described how she had to wait for one and half years to get into a Finnish course, because there was no course in the small neighboring municipality of Tampere where she lived. Interviewee 8, on the other hand, described that she was so excited thinking she could easily be employed in Finland because she had a degree in hotel management and tourism, but her degree was not recognized in Finland. Things turned better later when she was accepted into a university of applied sciences, and now she is almost finished with her studies and working as well. Interviewee 5 told that even though she had arrived in Finland as a quota refugee and received a lot of support and assistance in the beginning, applying for Finnish citizenship has been a long process. She described how she feels like she is living on water because she doesn't have any documentation from the country of origin either. During the interview, she described how she is kind of living in between countries. These kinds of bureaucratic obstacles or delays are harmful for both individuals and society. They affect the mental wellbeing and sense of belonging. I will write more about this in subchapter 5.3.

Interviewee 9 had another kind of experience about the early phase of her residency in Finland. She had a resident permit in another EU country, but she wanted to move to Finland to be with her boyfriend. She then found out that she cannot get a resident permit in Finland, but she had to move back to the other EU country where she was staying before migrating to Finland to renew her EU resident permit. Instead of leaving, she got married to her boyfriend, but she told

she wouldn't have gotten married if she was a European woman (= if she had had a resident permit). Four of the 10 interviewees described being vulnerable and / or dependent of their husbands (Finnish or other nationals) in the beginning of the integration process. This means that they were not independent, and they needed support in finding the right services.

5.2 Cultural integration and interactive integration

I interviewed women who have migrated to Finland from countries that are culturally, economically, and socially differently structured from Finland. The women had migrated from community-oriented societies to an individualist society, and this has affected the adaptation and integration processes.

5.2.1 Becoming accustomed to a new culture

When asked about life in Finland and Finnish norms and values, few things were underlined. Five interviewees described Finland as a safe or peaceful country. The problems here felt small compared to how the problems had been before migrating to Finland.

> *When we were in xx (country of origin), we had problems. And I was thinking maybe we will face problems here too, as immigrants, but everyone helps us, everyone explains, and everything is easier. How to explain? I can't… In Finland, we don't have problems, big problems. And also, all the workers help us, and the Finnish people help us. I don't talk to annoying, bad people in Finland, but in xx (country of origin) there were a lot of them. (Interviewee 2, translated from Finnish)*

Six of the interviewees described Finns as nice, respectful and / or supportive. On the other hand, seven of ten interviewees talked about how quiet or introverted Finnish people are, which was not seen as unambiguously good or bad. Some of the interviewees described that they prefer spending time alone and staying to themselves, and that is why they feel comfortable in Finland, and some described how unwelcomed or even discriminated they have felt in Finland. Adapting to individualism and the ideal of big personal space had felt challenging

to many of the interviewees. For example, interviewee 4 described that although Finns are generally good people, they are also difficult to approach, and that had changed her.

> *And so yes, I had to change a little bit, because I'm talkative, but now I don't talk to people. I don't force them to say hey or something like that. So, it was a bit hard for me, but as time goes by, I think I'm getting used to it. And now, I'm even scared when I go back home, how am I going to cope again. Because here… The life here is just lonely, it's a lonely life. It's like, for example, now it's just me and my two children. (Interviewee 4)*

Five out of ten interviewees pondered on individualism and collectivism. Settling down into a society so different from where the interviewees come from had not been easy. Finland was considered very individualist in both good and bad. For some, it was primarily a negative experience. For example, interviewee 9 described a situation where she needed to prove the Finnish authorities that she had enough money to have her resident permit renewed and she wanted to borrow the money from her Finnish partner and in-laws, but they did not lend her the money. She described:

> *It's something also about Finnish society: I think there's no empathy, helping or sympathy towards other people. Even it's part of your family. (…) The core norms here are… I would say independence. They raise the children to be independent, really. And when you arrive to certain age, we think, the society thinking you are adult, responsible of yourself and you are responsible for your whole life. Of course, through institutions people get help. (…) But that is… That is one of the visible and much touchable in the way I touch this chair, this individualism. But I think it's one of the core of the Finnish culture. Because through education, through society, through everything you receive to be independent and responsible of your own life. (Interviewee 9)*

In the group interview, the participants talked quite a lot about the differences between collectivist and individualist cultures. For one of the participants, it seemed to be a controversial thing. On the other hand, she appreciated the independence and freedom that would not be possible in her home country:

> *And also, because in my culture we live together with our in-laws…*
> *And if I.. if we lived in xx (country of origin), I would be living with my*
> *in-laws, which I can't imagine because… I've been living with my own*
> *space and thing here like for more than 10 years, in Europe and*
> *abroad. So, like, here it's much better. (Interviewee 6)*

At the same time, she misses having a community around her:

> *Because I have been living in a community as a kid… Like, we had*
> *some kind of community, you know, where you have some kind of*
> *celebrations, you know, like wedding parties or those kind of parties,*
> *small small celebrations, and we usually have this kind of community*
> *living in like these things… which here is quite different. Because*
> *here you're… you are like… I've been living here like… We bought*
> *this apartment almost three years back but I don't know no-one from*
> *the building. (Interviewee 6)*

The other two group interview participants appreciated the individualism in Finland.

> *Yeah… But as I said, I prefer that tendency compared to my own*
> *culture because.. umm.. I don't wanna be bad-mouthing my own*
> *culture (laughs) but the umm.. the sort of.. you know… You know*
> *what I mean. It's too much then it's too much. So, I prefer, actually,*
> *the privacy that I've got here, and the freedom of making my choices*
> *without being actually judged by people who are not really even*
> *related to me or important to me. So, I actually really enjoy it here.*
> *(Interviewee 7)*

> *Like you know, the thing is that the Finnish people or the culture that*
> *the people keep to themselves. And I think it's more of an individual*
> *thing because I've always been like that, even back home. Still when*
> *I moved here, it wasn't hard for me at all, you know, to be by myself*
> *and mind my own business. (Interviewee 8)*

There are fundamental differences between individualist and collectivist cultures, and it is an interesting theme when we discuss integration. Those who migrate from the Global South to Finland will inevitably face the difference, and that requires adaptation. In an individualist society, autonomy is highly valued, but individuals are also expected to take care of themselves and protect their personal goals. In a collectivist society, people emphasize social structures, relationships, and obligations to the community. (eg. Oyserman 2011, pp.171-172; van den Bos et al. 2015, p. 54.)

The climate was also a contradictory topic. Some of the interviewees appreciated the nature, the changing seasons and even the chilly weather. On the other hand, six of the interviewees said that winter (either the coldness or the darkness of it) had been the hardest thing to get accustomed to. One of the interviewees described how much it affects people's moods in Finland:

From my experience, when it's summer, people are more happy and outspoken, and they can smile. But when it's winter, especially that in November when it's dark, it seems like it's so depressing. It's like people walk watching down and no one wants to look anyone. It's so… The weather also is affecting somehow how you see people. It's also affecting me… sometimes. But when the snow starts falling, everything changes and becomes beautiful and good mood. It's only that dark month… (Interviewee 4)

Three of the interviewees said language had been hardest to get accustomed to, and it still seemed a challenge to most of the interviewees. Most of them rated their language skills intermediate. Two of the group interview participants felt quite comfortable with their language skills, and they had also gotten support and encouragement from their employers. For example, one of the participants had gotten free language classes provided by her employer. Some of the interviewees talked about the difference between spoken Finnish and the Finnish taught at the language courses. To improve their language skills and to get to *speak* Finnish, the interviewees had joined different NGO activities such as friendship programs. One of the interviewees described the meaning of different group meetings in gaining confidence to speak Finnish.

Two interviewees said racism or discrimination had been hardest. Two interviewees mentioned cultural habits (for example alcohol consumption or following religion-related dietary restrictions) being hard. One of the interviewees said othering has been the hardest thing to get accustomed to. I will write more about this in chapter 5.3. One of the interviewees said not finding good friends has been the hardest thing to get accustomed to.

5.2.2 Support from others

Integration does not happen in a vacuum but in social interaction with others. The interviewees underlined both the importance of having Finnish friends and acquaintances but also the role of partners, in-laws, and ethnic communities.

Nine out of the ten interviewees had migrated to Finland either because of their partner or together with their partner (or in one of the cases, the partner had followed shortly after the interviewee had migrated). After settling down to Finland, three of the interviewees had gone through a divorce, and two of the interviewees described they had had problems with both their husbands and in-laws. Many of the interviewees had experienced lack of support or understanding over their situations. Here is an example of this:

> *I remember when I arrived here, the first thing I thought: now I need a Finnish course. And in that time, I didn't know I could have a Finnish course through the… I knew I should be in TE office to have a Finnish course but I didn't know there's so much different place, different kind of course. Then my husband told: no, it's expensive. Then I got really angry, I thought how… I left everything behind me, I arrived to a country and I need to go to… First that is to go to learn a language. And he thinks it's expensive. And he has some… It was not so much for him to pay for some Finnish course or… I didn't learn any Finnish with him. (Interviewee 9)*

Interviewee 10 also described how complex her integration process has been at times. She experienced depression caused by difficulties in finding a job (structural integration) and problems with her husband's relative (interactive integration). At the same time, she went through a pregnancy and became a mother for the first time which activated a childhood trauma, and she experienced lack of support from her husband because he was busy with work. This led to problems in the relationship. She also described how she stayed at home with the baby a lot because it was hard to go out. Interviewee 1 also described being depressed after her husband left her while she was pregnant with their child and dependent on him. I will write about that in the next sub-chapter.

When talking about interactive integration, the role of partners, families, and in-laws is crucial. It forms a foundation for wellbeing, trust and feeling of belonging in the new country, and on the other hand, the lack of support from the partner or the immediate family can leave women vulnerable. When it comes to marriage or partnership, the interviewees voiced challenges to do with both intercultural relationships and relationships where both parties had the same ethnic background. In addition to the challenges or negative experiences, four of the interviewees described either love, support, or mutual understanding they received in their marriages.

In addition to partnerships, friendships and social activities had played a big role in the integration of the interviewees, although only two of nine interviewees said that they feel like they belong to communities here in Finland. One of the interviewees said she belongs to her work community, and one the interviewees said she belongs to quite a big community of people from the same country of origin. All ten interviewees said they have gotten to know Finnish people, but some felt that they are mainly acquaintances. One of the interviewees said that not making friends has been the hardest thing to get accustomed to in Finland.

 All the interviewees had met new people through MLL friendship program, since that was how I found the interviewees. This does not mean that all of them had made good friends through the program, but some had. For some of the interviewees, organizations such as MLL Tampere department, YWCA (in Finland NNKY) and Girls' House of Setlementti Tampere, which are providing gender-specific services, had become important platforms for socializing with others:

> *There is the staff, and I feel like they are my friends. And with you too. I am so happy about this. It helps me so much that I participate with others and Finns, so I said I want to talk all the time, I'm so social. (Interviewee 3, translated from Finnish)*

Some on the interviewees also mentioned meeting places such as Marhaban center at Kaleva church and Mukana. The interviewees had made friends mainly at work, during studies, and through friendship programs (MLL, university's

friendship program). Three of the interviewees also mentioned they had gotten to know their neighbors.

In the group interview, two of the participants ended up in an interesting conversation about our personalities influencing the construction of social networks in a new country. If the community ties and friendships have been strong before arriving to Finland, making friends in Finland can come as a shock to an introvert. Interviewee 7 described how she had made friends at work, through different activities and programs, and even just randomly meeting people. She had been very active and outgoing. Interviewee 6 commented on that.

> *Well, in this case I'm quite opposite because I usually don't get… I can't make friends like that, it takes time for me. I can't just talk to random new people, like going to somewhere and making friends. I'm not good at that kind of thing. And the first thing I got good friend was from here, like I said. And this also, I got information from the language teacher which was coming in my office. She told me about this program to get a friend, like Finnish friend from here. (…) I'm very bad at initiating or going to groups. I don't feel so much comfortable at that. I'm not that kind of getting open and friendly… (Interviewee 6)*

Interviewee 7 continued:

> *I love creating events! And I'm usually the one that hosts, or who organizes or who sort of introducing people together, mixing the circles so to say. And so yeah, I love doing that, and maybe that's the reason why… Yeah. And I love to try different things as well, and my family is just as well. So, they usually support me in doing community work, for example, volunteering. So, if you volunteer for example, you get to meet other people. So that helps you make friends as well. And then, play dates is a wonderful way. Maybe the other family can bring new families and you can get connected. (Interviewee 7)*

Weak structural integration and family life are known to reflect on women's social networks and interactive integration (EMN Finland 2022, p.11; Saukkonen 2020a, p. 24). Therefore, it is important to design services and develop practices that support intercultural interaction. Organizations and other non-governmental actors have an important role in this. (Saukkonen 2020a, p.24; Saukkonen 2020b,

p.200.) This is how interviewee 1 described the meaning of participating in different NGO activities and groups:

> *I was thinking when I expected the child and my husband left me, I am the only one going through this problem. But later, when I started to meet other mothers and friends too, I realized: others have these problems too! (…) Of course, there is joy in life now. Getting to know all the friends affected my life. That time I only had black in life, I couldn't see anything. But now, how to say? It's colorful and white. (Interviewee 1, translated from Finnish)*

Interviewee 7 also described the importance of having friends:

> *I mean, it's so very instrumental.. umm… to my integration here and also my quality of life here. I can't imagine my life, you know, without those supportive, friendly faces and people around us. And some time we need their help, extra help. Cause we're here just the two of us and our kid. We don't have our, you know, supportive family or the village, we call it, so they've been the village. So, I mean, incredibly important role they play in our life here. (Interviewee 7)*

Interviewee 9 was an educated, outgoing, and social woman, but she had found both structural and interactive integration hard in Finland. Making friends in Finland had felt the hardest thing to get accustomed to, and she also compared Finland to another European country:

> *To really, to find a real friend. And who you can count. I think that's the hardest one. The people, they are extremely quiet, or when they drink they are extremely noisy. There is no… I like the people in xx (the previous country of residence). They were talking. (…) It was enough to have a like a smiling and little chatting, like to have a small chat with people and like to lighten your day with small.. Maybe for the Finnish culture that is… doesn't make any sense. They are saying we don't talk without purpose. But in reality, there is a purpose. When you are saying something without saying anything really, there is purpose behind that. There are social thing with other people: you feel better, others also feel better. (Interviewee 9)*

5.2.3 Womanhood, motherhood and intergenerationality

The interviews painted a picture of complex situations migrant women can end up in. Gender was indisputably present in the stories of the interviewees. It

seemed the interviewees had balanced between different situations, roles, and cultures. A few of the interviewees had gone through a divorce after migrating to Finland. Some of the interviewees talked about depression, and some talked about loss of independence. Two talked about intergenerational challenges. One of the interviewees' husband had temporarily moved back to the country of origin to work there. Many of interviewees talked about children, motherhood, and priorities.

In the previous sub-chapter, I wrote about how interviewee 1 had suddenly been left when she was pregnant with her first child. She did not know other people in Finland yet, so she was vulnerable and desperate. Her experience was combined with cultural distress and embarrassment about being divorced, which is why she did not tell even the closest relatives that she went through a divorce. After the separation, she talked about her situation at the maternal health clinic (neuvola) and received a lot of help after that. That is how she eventually heard about different NGOs as well and started meeting new people.

Based on the interviewees' stories, motherhood affects the integration process on many levels, and mothers reflect their decisions through their children's wellbeing. Children can, on the other hand, be a motivation to integrate and settle down in the new country, but on the other hand, some of the women felt children were the only reason why they stayed in Finland. Interviewee 9 described she is like a hostage of her children: she cannot leave the country because of them. This is how interviewee 4 described her situation:

> *Because here is where my children are, and for me, my children are my first priority. And they are my first family, even though I have family back home, but they are my first priority. So, wherever they will be, that's meant to be my home, because they are my everything. They motivate me a lot. If it wasn't because of them, I would have not been here, I would have been at home. (Interviewee 4)*

All eight interviewees who had children reflected on the services through the lenses of motherhood. Three of them talked about feeling safe and appreciative for having access to free education and affordable healthcare. The group interview participants talked about safe and supportive daycare system. Two of

the interviewees also mentioned the role of maternal health clinic on their journeys of becoming mothers. One of the interviewees had had negative experiences with her child's daycare being understaffed and unreliable.

Becoming a mother is a tremendous transformation itself, and it can trigger unexpected emotional processes. That combined with an integration process can be overwhelming. This is how interviewee 10 described it:

> *Also, that time I had a lot of anger… I was very angry with my husband as well. That time I remember I (was) breastfeeding the baby, and then I went outside. People were sleeping. It was around 2am, and I felt like there was no place I could go. I couldn't go to meet my parents, you know, couldn't go back to xx (country of origin). I was here, like no job, I was not independent, and there's no place to go. And I was sitting outside and cried for two hours, and then came back and keep breastfeeding my baby. And my husband was sleeping and knows nothing. So, that was really difficult. (Interviewee 10)*

Six of the interviewees described women's role being better or less vulnerable in Finland than in the country they come from. Two of them specified that in Finland women can be in leadership positions or even in the politics unlike in their countries of origin. A few of the women talked quite a lot about the freedom women have in Finland, but one of the interviewees thought it is a good example of individualism that has been taken so far that for example divorce rates are so high in Finland. Gender equality was mainly seen as a positive thing, but it was criticized as well. One of the interviewees thought that Finland is not specifically gender equal.

Two of the interviewees discussed intergenerational challenges to do with integration, one from daughter's perspective and one from parent's perspective. Integration puts pressure on family dynamics and the relationship between parents and children. Scholars talk about *intergenerational cultural dissonance* (ICD) which is a clash between children and parents over cultural values. It is common among migrant families, and a typical scenario is migrant parents adhering to their traditional cultural values and practices while children endorse dominant Western values. (Choi et al. 2008, p.85.)

Interviewee 5 had migrated to Finland in her teens with her mother and siblings. Throughout the interview, she talked about living in between cultures. She described how her mother controls her life even though she's an adult. She also talked about gender inequality in the country she comes form, and she explained why women are so obedient to their families or "put up with their families", as she formed it:

> *There is no support, they don't support you. Then here in Finland, what a difference. Kela supports you, social workers support you if you have a problem or something. They choose an apartment for you, they do something, so you think there is someone or something behind you! So you trust, but there is no one or nothing behind me. So, I have to respect my family. That's why. It depends… For example, our boys… but in xx (country of origin) girls always burn. Always! Girls can't go to work, and they don't have money to close the door on family's face and leave. Because she has nothing! But boy, he has everything. For example, parents are afraid that boys will close the door and leave. Because boy has the freedom! (Interviewee 5, translated from Finnish)*

Interviewee 5 also talked about partnerships, marriage, sex, and the strict cultural norms around these topics. She explained that because of the hardness of it all, she will most likely not get married.

> *I'll tell you now, for real. If I had to have a boyfriend or I'm interested in some boy, so what.. What should I do? Tell me, why. I can't do anything with him. I can't go anywhere with him. And you have to hide all the time, so nobody finds out about him. And how can I move forward to live with him? Okay, one bad thing. If I tell mother these things, she wants me to get married quickly. But I don't want to! If I don't get to know him well, how can I marry him? If you get married, few years and you get tired of him. Maybe just a year you can put up with him. Really. Then I get all tired. This is how I think. That's why when I meet a boy or someone wants to get to know me, I say stop. (Interviewee 5, translated from Finnish)*

Interviewee 5 also talked about a culture within a culture. She described how her life would become really hard if she didn't live up to the cultural norms of her family. She explained that even though they live in Finland and abide by Finnish laws, there is another "wheel spinning" among families from her country of origin.

Interviewee 4 had another perspective to the intergenerational challenges. She described having a hard time with her teenage daughter, and she had contacted the social services to get support. This is how she described the situation:

> *Raising children is different, it's totally different. In xx (country of origin), a child, you should respect your parents and elderly people, and whatever your parents tell you, you should listen and not to argue. But here, I came to realize, parents are scared of their children, because I can see myself being so scared of my daughter right now. Every time whatever I have to say, I have to rethink, like how should I put it, how should I tell her, how will she feel, because she had put me in so many problems, and I don't want to go back to that kind of a road of threatening me… She is threatening me: "I know my rights and you have no right to tell me no, I cannot do this." Or maybe she will even say: "Okay, I will call the social and ask them that I want to live elsewhere", things like that. These children's rights what they teach them in school and the pressure they get, it's just difficult from where I'm coming from. (Interviewee 4)*

5.3 Identificative integration and barriers

The interviewees had contradictive feelings about the future in Finland. Seven of the interviewees said they feel like they belong in Finland, at least for now. For some, this feeling was connected to relationships they have formed here. For some the feeling had to do with raising their children: Finland was considered a safe country with a good education- and healthcare system. Some of the interviewees said they are happy here, and they feel optimistic about future. This is how interviewee 7 described it:

> *I connect with a lot of things here in Finland. That's why I've said that, you know, we found our second home here and we want to raise our family here on our own. To be honest, more than… the connection is stronger than with my own family back home or my own culture back home where I was born and raised. (Interviewee 7)*

A few of the interviewees had been wavering between hope and despair: they have difficulties seeing their future in Finland, but they try to reassure themselves. This was the case especially with some of the career-oriented interviewees and interviewees who had experienced discrimination. Many of the interviewees

talked about different forms of racism they have faced in Finland. They talked about everyday situations such as unexpected aggressive encounters on the streets, children being discriminated by other children, neighbors being hostile, disrespectful customer service and so on. One of the interviewees talked about her husband's family being racist. One of the interviewees talked about applying for jobs as an over-qualified candidate, and whether it would be a different experience if she had an American name or a European name. She had not been able to get a job. One of the interviewees felt that she had been treated extra nicely, and people had been helpful even when she did not ask for help.

Racism is a multilayered phenomenon which is why we can talk about multiple racisms instead of just one. One way to explore this is to separate structural racism, cultural racism, and everyday racism, and all these levels were present in the interviewees' stories. Structural racism refers to discriminative societal structures and institutional practices. It leads to unequal positioning in the job- or housing markets, for example. Cultural racism refers to hierarchical discrimination found for example in media and arts. Everyday racism emphasizes the experience of those who face racism. (Keskinen et al. 2021, pp.56-57.) This includes racial labeling, othering, and exotism which many immigrants have learned to accept (Makweri 2020, pp. 52-53; Seikkula & Hortelano 2021, pp. 147-156). This is partially rooted in the false idea of Finnish population being ethnically and "racially" homogeneous (Seikkula & Hortelano 2021, p. 150). This is how interviewee 5 described her experiences:

> *So sometimes, really, no matter how long you live in Finland, it still feels like you are an immigrant. (…) Okay, it's not bad that I'm an immigrant, I don't mind! But sometimes it feels like when they discuss or something… that okay, you are an immigrant. I don't mean they are bad people. That it's bad. I like the kind of life where everyone is… but the world is not like that. That everything is even. Everything should be the same. For example, wearing a scarf, not wearing a scarf. For example, I have a friend… Not all the friends wear a scarf, and people look: how can they be together when one is wearing a scarf and the other one is not. Sometimes I notice, and they ask, why she isn't wearing a scarf. I say: it doesn't mean she should have a scarf because I have one. These things really annoy me but yeah…*
> *(Interviewee 5, translated from Finnish)*

According to the data, experiencing unemployment, lack of social networks, lack of support from partners / in-laws, big life changes (such as divorce or becoming a mother), bureaucratic obstacles, and racism can affect mental health in many ways and thus affect the integration process. These findings are in line with many previously conducted studies. How immigrants feel about their integration is an outcome of different social interactions, experiences, losses, and success in everyday life. This means that mental wellbeing can naturally change during the integration process. (Kerkkänen & Säävälä 2015, pp. 21-22.)

The interviewees of this study dreamed of ordinary things. A few of the interviewees dreamed of getting a job. Three of the interviewees dreamed of a career or job opportunities where they could blossom and use their potential. Some of the interviewees dreamed of travelling, some dreamed of their parents being able to visit Finland. Two of the interviewees dreamed of having a more stress-free life or having inner peace. One of the interviewees said she dreams of buying an apartment or house in Finland. One of the interviewees dreamed of her family being happy and healthy and herself being a wise mother.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Heckmann's division of social integration into structural, cultural, interactive and identificative integration formed a holistic foundation for the analysis. It is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional framework developed for integration research. It is important to emphasize that: the public discussion on integration is often focused on structural and cultural integration, but interactive and identificative integration are equally important.

Most of the interviewees of this study felt that their structural and cultural integration had been relatively smooth. Most of the interviewees were satisfied with their current study- or employment situation, had gotten accustomed to Finnish culture, and their Finnish level was at least intermediate.

The interviewees formed a heterogeneous group, but the common factor was that they were all women who had migrated from the Global South (more specifically Southeast and South Asia, Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa). Many of the interviewees (but not all) had migrated for family reasons, which is the most common reason for migrating among women from the Global South (EMN Finland 2022, p.6). This itself places women in a vulnerable situation, and four of the interviewees described they had been vulnerable and / or dependent on their partners in the beginning of their integration processes.

Migrating for family reasons (eg. marriage or family reunification) combined with motherhood / becoming a mother and lack of support is a good example of a complex gender-specific situation affecting mental wellbeing and thus the whole integration process. Seven of the eight interviewees who were mothers had had their first child after migrating to Finland. This placed most of the interviewees in a situation where they had multiple new roles and had to meet several expectations simultaneously: they got accustomed to a new culture, learned the language, applied for jobs, or studied, and learned motherhood. This seemed to be especially hard for the highly educated and career-oriented interviewees. As mentioned in chapter 2.3, many recent studies have acknowledged this as

"motherhood penalty" which refers to the negative relationship between motherhood and women's labor market outcomes (Grubanov-Boskovic et al. 2020, p. 14). At the same time, as one of the interviewees discussed, racialized exclusion and discrimination exist in the labor markets (eg. Keskinen 2021, pp.215-217; Keskinen et al. 2021, p. 57). Combining multiple roles as a mother who has just migrated to another country is one thing, but what if you are also a person of color, wear a hijab, or have an African or Arabic name? These are the kind of intersectionalities I previously mentioned. Intersectional analysis emphasizes how racism and racialization construct the social realities even when racism is not acknowledged, but on the other hand, it refers to individuals' subjectivity as well. How do we identify ourselves based on, for example, gender, race, ethnicity, and class? (Keskinen et al. 2021, p.63.)

Integration does not happen in a vacuum, but it is socially constructed and happens in interaction with others. Many of the interviewees had experienced lack of support or understanding over their situations by their loved ones (eg. partners, in-laws), and after settling down to Finland, three of the interviewees had gone through a divorce. These situations were gender-specific, and the role of services such as maternal health clinic, social services and therapy were found crucial in finding and receiving help and support.

Social networks and support from others play a crucial role in the whole integration process. In fact, interactive integration can support structural, cultural, and even identificative integration. Social networks support the migrants' wellbeing both directly (emotional support, advice, help) and indirectly (strengthening resilience and self-confidence) (Kerkkänen & Säävälä 2015, p. 23). Getting support in finding the right services and employment, having someone to practice Finnish with and get to know the new hometown with, and receiving emotional support reduce the risk of loneliness and mental health problems such as depression. Services and initiatives that support interaction with others (eg. friendship programs, groups, and psychosocial support to strengthen the relationships between family members) are as important as learning the language or finding a job in supporting the mental wellbeing of immigrants. (Kerkkänen & Säävälä 2015, pp. 56-57.)

Social support can be seen as a preventive element that refers to both social networks and concrete support from the loved ones (Kerkkänen & Säävälä 2015, p. 57). In the data of this research, the negative experiences and lack of support from partners were emphasized, but on the other hand, many of the interviewees had gone through the most challenging phases of integration together with their partners. All the interviewees had met a friend through a friendship program, but they had also met new people through various other NGO activities and meeting places. Some had received support from or made friends with colleagues. For some, interaction with others happens primarily at work or at school, but being unemployed or on parental leave should not mean loneliness. That is why the role of civil society and non-governmental actors should be taken into consideration better (Saukkonen 2020a, p. 24). However, as some of the interviewees pointed out, joining this kind of spare-time activities can be challenging as well. For example, introverts or stay-at-home mothers can find it hard to join groups or meet new people and interact with them in a language they do not speak fluently. This is why low-threshold services and flexibility of those who work within social integration are needed.

Finland is an individualist country where community approach would be especially beneficial. Comparing individualism and collectivism was a theme that was raised by the interviewees. The interviewees of this study had migrated from the Global South to Finland, and that had been a leap from a community-oriented culture to an individualist one. In an individualist society, autonomy is highly valued, but individuals are also expected to take care of themselves and protect their personal goals, whereas in a collectivist society, people emphasize social structures, relationships, and obligations to the community. (eg. Oyserman 2011, pp.171-172; van den Bos et al. 2015, p. 54.) The interviewees had different opinions about this, but the negative consequences of individualism have been researched and discussed from different perspectives for years. For example, Finnish parents are among the most exhausted parents in the world, and this has been linked to individualism (Roskam et al. 2020). While wellbeing or communality in an individualist society are other research topics, it is wise to acknowledge this when designing and implementing new services. The role of communities is important in the current neoliberal era where the role of state as

a welfare provider has been reduced (Heinonen 2019, pp. 133-136; Saari 2011, pp. 289-292). How can we increase wellbeing and reduce loneliness not just among immigrants but in our society as a whole?

Some intergenerational challenges were raised by the interviewees of this study, and it is known that *dissonant acculturation* is a risk for migrant families (Peltola 2014, pp. 151-152). However, it has been researched among refugee families, for example, that certain methods such as *community collaborative approaches* are beneficial in supporting the families. Involving the whole family, community, and professionals in low-threshold activities that take all the dimensions of integration into consideration can be an effective preventive approach. Also, seeing the strengths and supporting the *resilience* of families is a preventive approach. (Weine 2011, pp. 417-419.)

I will now introduce two Talentia's Hyvä käytäntö (good practice) awarded examples of family and community support methods. The first one is the winner from 2022. It is Perhe yhtenäiseksi method which was developed in Oulu to support refugee families' integration. It is a holistic method based on the needs of refugee families. It covers eight themes including internal roles of family members, communication, trauma, parenting, whole family's integration and so on. Both the strengths and challenges are underlined. (Bimberg 2022.) The method is a great example of a holistic approach to work with refugee (or any migrant) families. The method has been widely praised, and the master's thesis of Bimberg (2023), who developed the method, was published when I was finalizing my thesis.

Another example is a community initiative that was implemented in Hervanta, Tampere. In 2016–2019, TEKO – an enhanced integration project – was piloted in Hervanta, and within the framework, a drop-in community center called Kototori was opened. The project was implemented by the Evangelical Lutheran Parishes of Tampere, Tampere municipality, Tampere University and Tampere University of Applied Sciences, and it was co-financed by the European Social Fund. Kototori offered "low-threshold counselling services to newly arrived immigrants in their own language and without the need for booking an appointment". The

project development a cross-disciplinary operations model where different organizations worked together across sectoral lines: social work professionals, Kela (the Social Insurance Institution), health services, and diaconal workers worked alongside students, local residents, and volunteers, representatives of different NGO's as well as *'experts by experience'* (local residents with an immigrant background). (Popova 2019, pp.17-18.) Kototori won the Hyvä käytäntö award in 2019. This kind of approaches ought to be the norm in integrative work.

The community approaches and community support is also an important aspect when it comes to what Heckmann (2006, pp. 24-25) calls identificative integration. It refers to the subjective *feeling of belonging* as well the identificational policies of the receiving country. Heckmann writes about this from an individual perspective but also from the society's perspective: it is equally important how the society is structured socially, and how it is shaped and affected by social integration. Saukkonen (2020a, p. 72) states that identification is not given, and the Western Europe has neglected the mental integration of immigrants and their children, and the price we pay are immigrants who identify only with the country of origin and are marginalized. That is why we all need to work harder for inclusive and diverse *Finnishness* everyone can identify with.

As I wrote earlier, there is a need for a paradigm shift from representation to identity (Lienen & LeRoux-Rutledge 2022, pp.1-2). Migrant women are often seen as representatives of cultures, nationalities, and religions, and they thus are easy targets for discrimination. Many of the interviewees of this study talked about this. They talked about everyday situations such as unexpected aggressive encounters on the streets, othering based on their clothing, children being discriminated by other children, neighbors being hostile, customer servants being disrespectful and so on. These realities seem to be ignored in the current political climate, which is unfortunate and short-sighted.

There is a need for antiracist feminism that is built into everyday struggles (eg. Keskinen 2021, pp. 201-218), and intersectionality is an important analytical tool in understanding these struggles (Grubanov-Boskovic et al. 2020, p.32). We

need to critically view our thinking, actions, and privileges. This includes us who work in the field of social integration, since we can also replicate racism and racialized structures. (Seikkula & Hortelano 2021, pp.153-161.)

It can be concluded that racism in all its forms, lack of social networks as well as lack of support from the loved ones were the biggest barriers to integration underlined by the interviewees of this study. Lack of work / career opportunities could be identified as a barrier for two of the academically educated interviewees. Similarly, work and meaningful studies as well as support from colleagues, friends, loved ones, non-governmental actors and communities as a whole were supporting factors. Interactive and identificative integration are as important as structural and cultural integration, and inclusiveness, empathy, and communality could strengthen migrants' *feeling of belonging.*

7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The thesis process was personally and professionally important. I have worked within women's social integration for almost four years, and during this process, the importance of continuous self-reflection was underlined. Burkholder et al. (2022, pp. 285-286) write that it is important to resist "the neoliberal demands of the academy" in conducting research for social change, and that is also important in our daily work as social welfare professionals. As a part of my thesis process, I recently reminded myself of the ethical principles of global social work (IFSW, 2018). They include promoting human rights, social justice and right to participation. It is hard to stand for these principles without ongoing self-reflection, which I consider one of the most important aspects of my professionality.

The day I wrote this chapter, I read in Helsingin Sanomat that the government of Finland has decided that the Strategic Research Council's (SRC) research program on migration for 2024 will not be accepted, and this can be seen as a political intervention on independent research (Junkkari 2023). It is probable that research and public discussion on migration and integration are going to get hander in the coming years. That means that we, as social welfare professionals, have to continue to work on inclusiveness and defend human rights and humanity even harder. In addition, as I wrote in chapter 6, professionals working with integration-related themes must also critically view their thinking, actions, and privileges, because racialized practices and structures can be replicated by everyone (Seikkula & Hortelano 2021, pp.153-154).

I am grateful to the participants of this study. The 10 women I interviewed openly shared their stories and sensitive experiences. Many of the stories were emotional, and many of the interviewees had experienced complexities and hardships during their integration processes. That is why I felt a sense of responsibility in sharing the stories in a respectful way. That is why I have long quotes in chapter 5, for example. I wanted to make sure that the women's voices are heard, but at the same time I pondered on ethical aspects in reporting the findings.

Since I started working in the field of social integration, I have heard comments about why there are so many services for women and nothing for men. Based on the findings of this study, there are so many intersectionalities in women's lives that there is a definite need for services and platforms that are specifically for women. However, I think that men need gender-specific services as well. Services are not mutually exclusive, but they complement each other.

The data collection process confirmed that strengthening participation and social inclusion is of paramount importance. As this thesis demonstrated, in many ways integration comes down to identity. So, my next question is: how do the women I work with view themselves, their skills, and their potential in relation to others and the society? That is why I started planning a new group which would aim at strengthening societal skills and self-confidence of women. During the data collection process, I also understood how important it is to be seen and heard. When we go through hardships and difficult processes in life, we need support from others. No man – or woman – is an island.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview structure

Structure for interviews

Structured by Friedrich Heckmann's theory of integration (2006)

Background information

Where do you come from?

When did you move to Finland, and with what status? (elaboration on this depending on the situation)

Did you migrate alone or with someone, who?

What was your educational background at the time you arrived in Finland?

How old are you?

How would you describe your life situation?

Structural integration

How was your arrival in Finland? What services did you receive (eg. integration plan)? Elaborate

What services supported your integration process in the beginning, and in what way?

Did you attend a Finnish course? For how long? How was the course?

What do you do at the moment (employment, studies, parental leave etc.)? Elaborate

Have you attended a degree program in Finland (vocational studies, university etc.), have you graduated?

Are you happy with your current employment / study situation, why / why not?

Has your child's / children's daycare or school affected your integration process, how?

What is your current residential status? Resident permit / citizenship? How has the process been to get where you are at?

Where do you live? Who do you live with?

Are you happy with your home?

Cultural integration

Do you speak Finnish? What is the level of your Finnish? Elaborate (some of the participants might speak English)

Do you feel like you have gotten to know Finnish culture and customs? What has supported you with that?

What has been hardest to get accustomed to in Finland?

What do you miss most about home?

How do you view Finnish values and norms, do they differ from yours and in what way?

Are you religious? What is your religion and how does it affect your daily life?

How do you view women's role in the Finnish society compared to where you come from?

Interactive integration

Have you gotten to know Finns (neighbors, colleagues etc.)?

Have you made friends with Finns? Where have you met your friends?

Do you have a Finnish partner / spouse?

Did you migrate to Finland together with your partner / spouse, or did your spouse already live in Finland when you migrated?

Have you participated in any spare time activities (hobbies, sports clubs, NGOs) in Finland, which ones?

What has been the meaning of your Finnish partner / friend / colleague / neighbor in settling into Finland? Have they supported or helped you with something, what / in what way?

What has been the meaning of the spare time activities in settling into Finland?

Identificative integration & barriers

Which country do you consider your home country at the moment? Why?

Do you feel like you belong in Finland, why / why not? If yes, when did you start feeling like that?

Have you felt welcomed or supported in Finland? In what way? If no, what would have made you feel welcomed?

Are you part of a community in in Finland? Which one?

Have you faced discrimination in Finland, what kind? How has it affected you?

How do you see your future?

What do you dream of?

Do you want to add something?

Haastattelurunko

Friedrich Heckmann theory of integration (2006)

Taustatiedot

Mistä olet kotoisin?

Milloin muutit Suomeen ja millä statuksella (tarkenna tarvittaessa)?

Muutitko yksin vai jonkun kanssa, kenen?

Mikä oli koulutustaustasi Suomeen muuttaessasi?

Kuinka vanha olet?

Miten kuvailisit elämäntilannettasi?

Rakenteellinen kotoutuminen (Structural integration)

Millainen oli saapumisesi Suomeen? Mitä palveluja vastaanotit (esim. kotoutumissuunnitelma)?

Mitkä palvelut tukivat kotoutumisprosessisi alkuvaihetta, miten?

Kävitkö suomen kielen kurssilla? Kuinka pitkään? Millainen kurssi oli?

Mitä teet tällä hetkellä (työ, opiskelu, vanhempainvapaa tms.)?

Oletko tehnyt tutkintoon tähtääviä opintoja Suomessa (esim. ammattikoulu, korkeakoulu)? Oletko valmistunut?

Oletko tyytyväinen nykyiseen työ- tai opiskelutilanteeseesi? Miksi / miksi et?

Onko päiväkoti tai lasten koulu vaikuttanut sinun tai perheeseesi kotoutumisprosessiin, miten?

Mikä on tämänhetkinen oleskelustatuksesi (oleskelulupa, kansalaisuus)? Millainen prosessi tähän pisteeseen on ollut?

Missä asut ja kenen kanssa?

Oletko tyytyväinen kotiisi?

Kulttuurinen kotoutuminen (Cultural integration)

Mikä on suomen kielen tasosi? Tarkenna.

Koetko, että olet oppinut tuntemaan suomalaista kulttuuria ja suomalaisia tapoja? Mikä sinua on tukenut siinä?

Mihin on ollut vaikeinta sopeutua Suomessa?

Mitä ikävöit eniten kotimaastasi (käytän maan nimeä, en termiä kotimaa)?

Mitkä ovat mielestäsi keskeisiä suomalaisia arvoja ja normeja? Eroavatko ne sinun arvoistasi ja normeistasi, miten?

Oletko uskonnollinen? Mikä on uskontosi ja miten se vaikuttaa päivittäiseen elämääsi?

Mitä ajattelet naisten roolista suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa verrattuna naisten rooliin kotimaassasi (käytän maan nimeä)?`

Vuorovaikutuksellinen kotoutuminen (Interactive integration)

Oletko tutustunut suomalaisiin (esim. naapureihin, kollegoihin)?

Oletko ystävystynyt suomalaisten kanssa? Missä olet tavannut ystäväsi?

Onko sinulla suomalainen kumppani?

Muutitko Suomeen kumppanisi kanssa, tai asuiko kumppanisi Suomessa jo silloin kun muutit tänne?

Oletko osallistunut Suomessa vapaa-ajan toimintaan (harrastukset, järjestöt jne.), millaiseen?

Mikä on ollut kumppanisi / ystävien / kollegoiden / naapureiden merkitys asettumisessasi Suomeen? Ovatko he tukeneet tai auttaneet sinua jotenkin, miten?

Mikä on ollut vapaa-ajan toiminnan merkitys asettumisessasi Suomeen?

Identifioiva kotoutuminen ja kotoutumisen esteet
(Identificative integration & barriers)

Minkä maan koet tällä hetkellä kotimaaksesi? Miksi?

Tunnetko kuuluvasi Suomeen, miksi / miksi et? Jos kyllä, milloin aloit tuntea niin?

Oletko tuntenut itsesi tervetulleeksi ja tuetuksi Suomessa? Miten? Jos et, mikä olisi saanut sinut tuntemaan olosi tervetulleeksi?

Oletko osa jotakin yhteisöä Suomessa? Mitä?

Oletko kohdannut syrjintää Suomessa, millaista? Miten se on vaikuttanut sinuun?

Miten näet tulevaisuutesi?

Mistä unelmoit?

Haluatko lisätä jotain?

APPENDIX 2. Information letter for the participants

Tietoa opinnäytetyöstä

Annat haastattelun / osallistut ryhmäkeskusteluun, jonka avulla kerätään aineistoa opinnäytetyötäni varten. Teen Helsingin Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulussa (DIAK) englanninkielistä sosionomi YAMK-tutkintoa *global change and community development*. Teen opinnäytetyön yhteistyössä MLL Tampereen osaston kanssa.

Opinnäytetyön aihe on naisten kotoutuminen, ja fokus on naisten omissa kokemuksissa. Toivon siis, että haastattelun / ryhmäkeskustelun aikana voit avoimesti kertoa omista kotoutumiseen liittyvistä kokemuksistasi. Haastattelun / ryhmäkeskustelun runko on rakennettu Friedrich Heckmannin kotoutumisteorian (2006) mukaan.

Haastattelu / ryhmäkeskustelu nauhoitetaan. Opinnäytetyön julkaisun jälkeen kaikki haastatteluaineistot tuhotaan, ja tunnistetiedot poistetaan opinnäytetyöstä. Opinnäytetyö julkaistaan viimeistään joulukuussa 2023, ja se tulee löytymään julkisesta Theseus -tietokannasta.

Opinnäytetyön ohjaaja Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulussa on Marja Katisko.

Information about the thesis

You have agreed to give an interview / participate in a group discussion for the purposes of my thesis, which is a part of my master's degree program *Global change and community development* at Diaconia university of applied sciences (DIAK, Helsinki unit). The thesis is written in cooperation with MLL Tampere department.

The topic of the thesis is women's integration, and the focus is on women's own experiences. I thus ask you to openly share your experiences on your integration process. The interview / group discussion is structured based on Friedrich Heckmann's theory of integration (2006).

The interview / group discussion will be recorded. The thesis will be published in Theseus database by the end of 2023, and after publication, all the data will be destroyed. Anonymity will be protected in reporting the findings.

The thesis supervisor at DIAK is Marja Katisko.

Kiitos osallistumisestasi! Thank you for participating!

Ystävällisin terveisin / Best Regards,

Elli Nieminen
xx@student.diak.fi

APPENDIX 3. Interview consent form

Interview consent form

I agree to be interviewed for the purposes of Elli Nieminen's thesis, which is a part of her studies at Diaconia university of applied sciences master's degree program Global change and community development. The topic of the thesis is women's integration.

I agree that the interview will be recorded. The thesis will be published in Theseus database by the end of 2023, and after publication, all the data will be destroyed. Anonymity will be protected in reporting the findings.

Date and place: _____

Signature: _____