Taking Refuge in Religion: Buddhist-Oriented Coping following Late-Life Immigration

Sachindri Wijekoon[1] ⬤, Debbie Laliberte Rudman[2], Carri Hand[2] and Jan Polgar[2]

[1]Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada and [2]School of Occupational Therapy, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

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Résumé

Bien que la religion soit reconnue comme une ressource aidant à composer avec le vieillissement, peu d'études ont examiné comment la religion est invoquée pour faire face aux facteurs de stress associés à l'immigration à un âge avancé. Le présent article s'appuie sur des données générées dans le cadre d'une étude phénoménologique de l'expérience du vieillissement hors du lieu de résidence, et présente une analyse herméneutique d'extraits textuels portant sur les croyances et les pratiques bouddhiques de dix immigrants âgés nés au Sri Lanka, qui abordent également le processus par lequel ces croyances les ont aidés à faire face aux facteurs de stress associés à l'immigration. L'étude a permis de mettre en évidence quatre types d'expériences partagées qui ont été facilitées par l'engagement religieux : l'engagement religieux comme source de motivation, donnant un sens à la souffrance et nourrissant l'espoir, le non-attachement, et les liens avec le passé et la communauté ethnoreligieuse. Les immigrants plus âgés se sont appuyés sur l'engagement religieux pour rester déterminés face à l'adversité, soulignant l'importance de milieux et de services adaptés à la culture pour soutenir l'adaptation facilitée par la religion. Les résultats sont interprétés au regard de la théorie du coping religieux de Pargament (1997).

Abstract

Despite a recognition of religion as a resource for coping in later life, few studies have examined how religion is summoned to cope with the stressors of late-life immigration. Drawing upon data generated in a phenomenological study of the aging-out-place experience, this article presents a hermeneutic analysis of textual extracts addressing 10 Sri Lankan-born late-life immigrants' Buddhist beliefs and practices, and how these beliefs and practices contributed to coping with immigration stressors. Four shared experiences facilitated through religious engagement were revealed: religious engagement as a source of purpose, making meaning of suffering and experiencing hope, non-attachment, and connecting to the past and the ethnoreligious community. Late-life immigrants drew on religious engagement to remain resolute amidst adversities, thus reinforcing the importance of culturally responsive milieus and services to support religion-focused coping. Findings are interpreted in relation to Pargament's (1997) theory of religious coping.

Introduction

Aging out-of-place, the physical and emotional experience of growing older in a foreign environment (Sadarangani & Jun, 2015), is part of the late-life experience for a growing number of older adults (Ng, Lai, Rudner, & Orpana, 2012). Scholarly research distinguishes migration patterns among older migrants by whether the dominant motivation is amenity seeking or family joining (Sunil, Rojas, & Bradley, 2007; Warnes, 2009). "Amenity-seeking migrants" are often younger, affluent retirees who are driven by lifestyle considerations. In contrast, family-joining or "assistance-seeking" migrants tend to be older (over 60) and immigrate to live with relatives because of minor disabilities, adverse life experiences such as widowhood (Sunil et al., 2007), or familism (Sadarangani & Jun, 2015).

The diverse motivations behind late-life immigration can lead to a variety of experiences, including new opportunities and experiences as well as unwanted outcomes (Finney & Marshall, 2018). Leaving one's homeland and adapting to a linguistically and culturally dissimilar societal framework can be a stressful life transition (Levitt, Lane, & Levitt, 2005; Maleku, España, Jarrott, Karandikar, & Parekh, 2021). Migration also interferes with the typical transitions associated with aging (Mui & Shibusawa, 2008), because most older adults prefer to age in place (Treas, 2009).

Within the Canadian socio-political context, approximately 3.3 per cent of older adults are late-life immigrants (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). Sri Lanka was among

the top source countries of Canadian immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017). This study focused on Sri Lankan-born, Buddhist, late-life immigrants to Canada, a group who may face challenges arising from cultural and linguistic differences between their home country and Canada.

Older parents and grandparents are primarily admitted to Canada through sponsorship, usually by a previously settled immigrant adult child. Since 2014, sponsors are required to assume financial responsibility for the older adult for a period of 20 years (Government of Canada, 2020), an increase from the previous commitment of 10 years. Sponsored parents and grandparents, who are ineligible for social assistance for the duration of the sponsorship agreement, are supported by the sponsor for, essentially, the remainder of their lives, irrespective of changes in the sponsors' living circumstances (Chen & Xiaohan Thorpe, 2015).

The complexity of rules for government income supports and the sponsorship guidelines, combined with late-life immigrants' limited fluency in the host country's official languages, present them with significant challenges in navigating the post-migration context independently. Consequently, they become financially, physically, socially, and emotionally dependent on the sponsoring family (Ng, Northcott, & Abu-Laban, 2004; Treas & Mazumdar, 2002; Diwan, 2008). In intergenerational homes, late-life immigrants experience burdensome domestic responsibilities, role reversal in family hierarchy, intergenerational conflict, and feelings of being underappreciated and of a loss of traditional values because of younger generations' assimilation to the host society (Kalavar & Van Willigen, 2005; Lamb, 2009). Compared with younger immigrants, the additional physical, economic, and social adversities faced by late-life immigrants heighten their mental health risks (Guo, Stensland, Li, Dong, & Tiwari, 2019).

Late-life migrants are able to cope with and buffer the negative effects of immigration in an adaptive way to preserve a high quality of life (Guo et al., 2019; Guo, Wang, Liu, Stensland, & Dong, 2021). Given the stressors involved in late-life immigration, and their potential amplification for those who face cultural and linguistic differences between the home and receiving countries, there is a need to expand knowledge on coping strategies utilized by late-life immigrants. In particular, religion is recognized as a resource for coping in later life (Pargament, 1997). However, there is a scarcity of research explicitly examining if and how religion is summoned to negotiate stressors of later-life immigration. This article presents findings to help address this gap.

Religious Coping

Religious beliefs and behaviour are commonly used by older adults to manage stressful life transitions and experiences (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988). Pargament's (1997) empirically supported theory of religious coping provides a model to study the role of religion during stress. When pushed beyond their limits by circumstances outside their control, people lean on their orienting system to develop religious solutions to resolve stress.

Findings regarding the impact of religion in coping with migratory challenges have been primarily coincidental (e.g., Choudhry, 2001; Maleku et al., 2021; Silveira & Allebeck, 2001). The few studies that have explicitly examined the link between religion and coping among older immigrants (e.g., Ciobanu & Fokkema, 2017; Kim, 2013; Roh, Lee, & Yoon, 2013; Zhang & Zhan, 2009) demonstrate that religiosity counterbalances migration-related grief and loss, but they primarily focus on Judeo-Christian samples. The religious coping literature's inattention to religious minorities

(Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015) is problematic, given that Judeo-Christian concepts may not resonate with non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism (Phillips, Michelle Cheng, Oemig, Hietbrink, & Vonnegut, 2012).

Buddhism and Sri Lankan Buddhists in Canada

This article explores Sri Lankan-born, Buddhist, late-life immigrants' religious beliefs and practices and how these beliefs and practices contributed to coping with late-life immigration stressors, drawing upon findings that emerged in a broader phenomenological study addressing the experience of "aging out of place". To contextualize this study and its findings, it is important to attend to Buddhism, in relation to its situatedness in Canada, its predominance amongst Sri Lankans in Canada, and connections between its basic principles and practices with coping.

Sri Lanka's population is overwhelmingly Buddhist (70.1%) and belongs to the Sinhalese ethnic group (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2012). Sinhalese elderly are "predominantly religious," and their religious inclination is "the predominant preoccupation and the concern in their lives" (Welgama, 2016, p. 31). Older Sinhalese Buddhists engage in religious practices, such as observing precepts on sacred days, giving alms, and partaking in merit rituals, individually and collectively in both private and public spaces alike. Uncertainties and major events of suffering experienced in older age trigger a sudden growth in religiosity among these older adults, which serves as a coping strategy to boost psychological integrity (Welgama, 2016).

Sinhalese immigrants to Canada retain close ties to Buddhism (Matthews, 2006). Buddhist temples in Canadian metropolises serve as places of worship where contemporary Buddhist rituals are performed, but on a smaller scale and in a different form than in Sri Lanka. Temples also serve as "cultural havens" for the diasporic community, and hubs for social and cultural activities that help maintain the Sri Lankan culture (Bikkhu, 2010).

The predominant form of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka is the Theravada school (Keown, 2013), which offers a general framework to make meaning of suffering and stress. The primary sources of stress and suffering are said to be located within the individual, rooted in one's primordial ignorance that causes clinging and rejecting, craving and aversion. Within Buddhism, coping does not aim to reduce stress, but rather seeks to modify stress through personal transformation achieved through mental discipline and enlightenment. Buddhism holds that coping is not merely a response to a stressful stimulus, but a means to escape all of life's suffering (Chen, 2006).

Buddhism's basic tenets – the Four Noble Truths – guide coping (Chen, 2006). The first states that life is suffering because it is impermanent. The body is susceptible to frailty, sickness, and death. Everything, including one's feelings, thoughts, bodily processes, wealth, and success constantly fluctuate and provoke suffering (Keown, 2013). Thus, suffering extends beyond physical or emotional pain, to include the worry and anxiety that accompany life's inherent transiency.

The Second Noble Truth implicates ignorance to this reality as the root of suffering (Keown, 2013). Ignorance creates karma, which refers to the good and bad acts of one's speech, body, and thought, which generate a corresponding good or bad consequence. Ignorance, when combined with attachment, craving, or greed; and aversion, anger, or hatred are the primary causes for one to remain in the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (Samsara) and its suffering. One's accumulated karma determines the kind of

existence they will have in their present existence and in their next life (Keown, 2013).

The Third Noble Truth refers to the elimination of suffering through enlightenment. It is believed that one who attains enlightenment will be freed from the suffering of Samsara (Keown, 2013).

The Fourth Noble Truth identifies practices for attaining enlightenment and escaping suffering (Keown, 2013). These practices are divided into three categories: morality, meditation, and wisdom. In morality, one must not speak, behave, and live in a manner harmful to oneself or others. Meditation requires mindfulness in everyday life and in formal meditation to attain increasingly higher levels of mental concentration to generate wisdom. Wisdom is the mental capacity to detach from craving, aversion, and other negativities (Chen, 2006).

Relatively few studies have examined Buddhist-oriented religious coping in the context of aging (Xu, 2019) and even fewer have examined Buddhist-oriented coping among older immigrants. Soonthornchaiya and Dancy (2006) found that older Thai Buddhist immigrants visited temples, talked with monks, meditated, and practiced Buddhist teachings for daily life to address depression. Pincharoen and Congdon (2003) found that older Thai Buddhist immigrants found religious participation to offer personal and spiritual resources to cope with losses, conflicts, and other difficulties tied to the aging process. However, neither study examined late-life immigrants. Further understanding the nexus of Buddhism, immigration, and aging can offer insights into how religion is used to negotiate challenges that accompany aging out-of-place.

Research Design and Methods

We applied an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore Buddhist late-life immigrants' experience of aging out-of-place. As a "meaning-giving method of inquiry" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 28), *interpretative* phenomenology facilitated the depiction of the experiences of late-life immigrants through their voices, and the interpretation of meanings of their aging-out-of-place experience within the context of their everyday lives. Within this broader phenomenological study, religious practices and beliefs were expected to emerge as important elements of the aging-out-of-place experience of older Buddhists. This article presents an in-depth analysis of participants' descriptions of lived experiences of Buddhist beliefs and practices in relation to coping with late-life immigration stressors. Ethics approval was obtained from the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics board.

Participants

Inclusion criteria were being Sri Lankan-born older adults (65 years of age or older) who immigrated to Canada up to 10 years prior to the study, living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), being able to recount and reflect on their experiences, and being able to communicate and understand either English or Sinhalese. Specifically, those who immigrated between 2007 and 2017 were purposively recruited because the sponsorship conditions at the time of the study required sponsors to support the sponsored person for 10 years. The focus on this length of undertaking captures an epoch of vulnerability of later-life immigration that may call for coping strategies. Participants were specifically sought from the GTA because of its overall racial diversity, and the local density of Sri Lankans (Nanayakkara, 2011; Reeves, 2013).

Participants were invited to share their lived experiences of aging out-of-place, and how the things they do in their daily life influence their relationship with and attachment to their environments in the Canadian context. Three well-connected insiders in the community and those who had local authority (e.g., Buddhist monks) introduced Dr. Wijekoon to individuals who matched the inclusion criteria. Flyers at ethnoreligious spaces, advertisements in ethnic newspapers, and word of mouth also aided recruitment.

Within qualitative research, sampling is an iterative process. Sample size is determined by researcher judgements regarding the "information-richness" of the data (Patton, 2015, p. 245). A sample size of 6–12 participants is recommended for phenomenological inquiry (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Ten participants, four females and six males, ranging in age from 72 to 82 years, were recruited. All participants were sponsored by an adult child. Nine co-resided with the sponsor and one lived separately with a grandchild. All participants identified as devout Buddhists.

Procedure

Dr. Wijekoon conducted two in-depth phenomenological interviews, each lasting from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews explored and gathered pre-reflective experiential narrative material, stories, or anecdotes to develop a rich and deep understanding of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). The first interview began by asking, "What is it like to age in a place where you did not spend your youth or adulthood?" Prompts such as "What does a typical day look like for you?" "Can you tell me about a good or difficult experience in Canada?" "Can you tell me an example of something that has helped you adjust to life in Canada?" assisted participants to reflect and describe their aging out-of-place experience. The prepared questions were varied, altered, or discarded to be responsive to participants' shared experiences. Questions related to Buddhism and religious coping were asked only when participants raised these topics.

During the second interview, Dr. Wijekoon probed more deeply into experiences that were alluded to in the first interview. Personalized questions were developed from the analysis of the first interview and participants were encouraged to provide anecdotes to further exemplify their narrative. Moreover, Dr. Wijekoon presented and discussed with participants the nascent interpretations emerging from early stages of the iterative process of interpreting the data. The interviews, conducted in Sinhalese or English, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological method; namely, phenomenological reflection and phenomenological writing, was drawn on to understand the experience of late-life immigration. In this article, we focus on one key thematic area from this analysis, specifically, the role that religion plays in participants' ability to cope with late-life immigration stressors.

To analyze participants' Buddhist beliefs and practices and how they contributed to coping with immigration stressors, Drs. Wijekoon and Polgar undertook hermeneutic engagement with interview transcripts to "understand the sense of the text" (Gadamer, Weinsheimer, & Marshall, 2004 [originally published in 1975], p. 364) from the participants' situated and perspectival nature of knowing. Drs. Wijekoon and Polgar independently analyzed the English transcripts. They met to compare and discuss codes. Dr. Wijekoon analyzed the Sinhalese transcripts

prior to translation to avoid potential misunderstanding of the meaning underlying participants' experience (Chen & Boore, 2009; van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). A professional translator assisted the translation of excerpts from Sinhalese transcripts. Drs. Wijekoon and Polgar discussed the translated quotes and their meanings.

Drs. Wijekoon and Polgar read and re-read the transcripts from the vantage point of asking what they say about these late-life immigrants' Buddhist beliefs and practices and how these beliefs and practices contributed to coping with immigration stressors. All quotes that attended to religion in the context of late-life immigration were extracted and labelled according to participant, and formed the text for the hermeneutic analysis. To "understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole" (Gadamer et al., 2004 [originally published in 1975] p. 291), the analysis involved a circular process of relating the quotes or sections to the meaning of the whole text, to broaden the sense of the text as a whole, while simultaneously expanding the meaning of the parts. This back-and-forth movement led to a deeper and richer understanding of participants' quotes (Dreyfus, 1991), to transform understanding. Similar narratives across all the stories helped the late-life immigrants' perspectives to emerge.

Particular quotes were re-read and annotated while holding a "*prejudice of completeness*" (Gadamer et al., 2004 [originally published in 1975] p. 294). Specifically, the researchers viewed each quote as being complete and representative of the experience shared by the participant. Participants were assumed to be more informed about the phenomenon than the researchers because of their lived experience. Participants' words and descriptions gave hints to the researchers that aided in their understanding.

Researchers noted the "*polarities of familiarity and strangeness*" (Gadamer et al., 2004 [originally published in 1975] p. 295) in how the parts and the whole of the text connected with the researchers. Dr. Wijekoon's nsider positionality as a Sri Lankan Buddhist immigrant welcomed expected stories, such as the sense of belonging and community offered by the religious community. Simultaneously, her outsider positionality, stemming from the generational gap and immigration to Canada in childhood, elicited unexpected stories such as the temple becoming a platform for empowerment. She conducted a continual review of the data to check interpretations and worked with multiple coders (J.P., D.L.R., and C.H.) to ensure openness to unexpected stories.

The authors of this article employed several criteria; namely, balanced integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization, to promote the rigour of research (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). They discussed and justified major decisions of the study and the use of previous literature. Dr. Wijekoon used an audit process and a reflexive journal to document each step. The research team discussed the relevance of findings in relation to current and future theory, particularly in relation to religious coping and practice. The study findings connect the reader to personal or plausible experiences in their own lives by situating the reader in the context of the phenomenon. Actualization will be achieved through the further interpretation of others as these interpretations and findings are disseminated.

Findings

In presenting the four themes, specifically, religious engagement as a source of purpose, making meaning of suffering and experiencing hope, non-attachment, and connecting to their pasts and to the ethnoreligious community, we analyze how participants' Buddhist beliefs and practices contributed to their coping with late-life immigration stressors. Throughout presenting these themes specific to religion, the ways in which participants described the experience of aging out-of-place are also introduced, to contextualize why and how religion was drawn upon to cope with the challenges of this experience. Themes are illustrated using participants' quotations, using pseudonyms.

Religious Engagement as a Source of Purpose

In the aftermath of immigration, many activities, roles, and relationships that had previously occupied participants' time, contributed to daily structure and routine, and provided meaning and purpose, were abandoned.

> I lived as a very sociable person [in Sri Lanka]. I do not have the opportunity to continue that level of socialization here. It is during the winter that I feel most restricted, alone and isolated. I cannot stay in one place like this. – Bandula

These losses led to participants' perceived loss of competence, self-worth, and identity. Additionally, aging in Canada was shaped significantly by the political, social, and economic forces associated with the sponsorship conditions, which further restricted participants' control over their daily activities and futures.

> In Sri Lanka, a lot of people visits us. Here I cannot entertain my friends according to my wishes because it will be a nuisance to the [sponsoring child's family]. — Saman

Religious engagement became a predominant and salient activity amid these stressors, which pacified the mental and emotional strain experienced following immigration.

Although the loss of former familial and social obligations of the homeland was a challenge, participants re-framed it as an opportunity to devote to religious pursuits.

> I went to the temple a lot [in Sri Lanka], gave alms, and did all that. But we truly did not have the time. If we didn't go somewhere, then relatives and visitors would come to us. Now the free time and the lack of chaos is good. Studying Buddhism in depth started in Canada. More than before, I now have a deeper understanding of Buddhism. – Apsara

Similarly, Geetha described the renewed religious pursuit.

> I learnt more about my religion here because I have all the time to devote, to read books, and to delve into the matter. I didn't know the doctrine so much before [immigration].— Geetha

Participants described the host society as ideally suited for engaging in prescribed religious practices.

> In Sri Lanka we carry our children on our shoulders and look after them till they are thirty or forty. There's no such thing in this country. We can now purify our minds for the remaining journey [towards enlightenment]. – Ranil

Participants viewed the loss of former obligations as creating time and space for renewed religious practices and hence, saw late-life immigration as complementary to their spiritual journey.

Although participants had adhered to the Buddhist doctrine and its prescribed religious practices throughout their lives, this

perfunctory adherence became unsatisfactory following immigration.

> I am a Buddhist by birth because my mother and father were Buddhists. [In Sri Lanka] I recited the Buddhist stanzas and visited the temple. That's not enough. I was only a Buddhist by name. That's blind devotion. Now I am trying to be a genuine Buddhist. – Saman

As believers of Samsara, these Buddhist participants envisioned futures that were not limited to the immediate, rather extending beyond this lifetime to probable future lives. Participants integrated prescribed practices to achieve deliverance from the cycle of suffering, rather than simply engaging in the observable manifestation of the Buddhist orientation.

> Even if you give mountains of alms, even if I adhered to the eight precepts there is no point. If one does not develop one's mind and does not advance along the path [to enlightenment], we cannot escape [samsara].—Vijith.

The spiritual pursuit manifested an overwhelming sense of purpose among participants.

> It's only now that we understand that being reborn is a reality. If there is a possibility to put an end to it, that is my greatest expectation.—Apsara

Aligning themselves to a spiritual purpose allowed participants to become part of something bigger that was outside of themselves, and thus become less focused on the subsidiary worries and anxieties associated with late-life immigration.

In turn, participants meditated, adhered to precepts, listened to Buddhist sermons, chanted prayers, read Buddhist texts, discussed religious teachings, and engaged in meritorious acts as a part of their daily routine "without fail" (Sujatha). Connected to coping, these engagements caused worries about the stressful foreign environment and intergenerational household to fade, and purified the mind.

> When I go to the temple, I really forget everything else… nothing about my children or anything. All the worries and feelings you have at that time goes away.— Geetha

All other activities were structured around religious engagement. Apsara explained, "I get up around 6 in the morning and worship the Buddha and meditate until about 8. The mind is calm and quiet at the time I wake up. Only after this will I engage in other activities".

Participants recognized their limitations as older persons and older immigrants, and instead relied on their inherent strengths; "When one has no physical strength, they try to develop the mind." (Saman). Coping depended on personal transformation achieved through mental discipline, which was also understood to be the key to attaining enlightenment. Saman explained; "I have the knowledge, but I do not yet have the wisdom. Wisdom is beyond knowledge. It needs to be cultivated from within. So, it's rather difficult." To train the mind to be more present, participants engaged in disciplined meditation. They described graduating to different meditative states, each one more profound and refined than the preceding one, and each involving total absorption and deep focus.

> In meditation, I close my eyes, I inhale and exhale. At first, I am conscious of my breath. With time it comes naturally. After that, I begin to see a blue light. When I concentrate on that light, my mind doesn't go here nor there. My mind is trapped by that light. – Vijith

Meditation was described as effective at controlling the incessant and unproductive brooding thoughts of their pasts and their uncertain futures.

> It's through meditation that relief is brought to my mind. It is a sort of lightness that I begin to feel. [I] don't take unnecessary ideas into my mind. In meditation, I forget the past, don't keep any expectations about the future, and live in the present moment.—Vijith

The development of mental discipline furnished a sense of control over their thoughts and emotions, which counterbalanced stressful circumstances. Feeling overworked within the intergenerational home, Sujatha described how mental discipline enabled her resilience.

> Sometimes I feel that I should be tired [from housework]. Then I wonder why. From meditation I understand [doing for others] is a form of happiness. I do this for my children. So, I never let myself feel tired. Whatever problem crops up, I can tolerate it.

Religious engagement facilitated a sense of purpose and redirected participants' energies in a constructive and meaningful way, distracting them from the stressors of late-life immigration. Although religious engagement emerged as a means to fill an occupational void, it transformed into a meaningful activity that progressed participants towards enlightenment. Participants held onto hope that their present or future lives would change for the better once their spiritual goals were realized.

Making Meaning of Suffering and Experiencing Hope

Participants used Buddhist concepts such as suffering, impermanence, and karma to interpret and transform stressful situations into explicable and acceptable experiences, thus reconfiguring their outlook to one that is more pragmatic and optimistic. As an example, the conditions of their immigration disrupted and rearranged the traditional hierarchical relationship between parent and child. The adult child, financially equipped and versed in the Canadian context, was promoted to a senior status. Having immigrated at "unemployable" ages, late-life immigrants became dependent on their children for financial support, for meeting basic necessities, and for deciphering the unfamiliar socio-cultural context. Living in the shadows of sponsoring children encumbered participants' agency, choice, and control in everyday life. Ranil, a lifelong drinker, submitted to the wishes of his sponsoring child and discontinued drinking, which impacted other socialization opportunities; Sujatha was urged by her daughter to discontinue the use of Ayurvedic medicine despite her firm belief in the traditional healing system; Bandula's desire to obtain a Canadian driver's license was discouraged by the sponsoring family on the basis of his older age; and all participants reported limited influence over household, financial, and childcare decisions. Ranil captured the complex layers of post-migration family dynamics and intergenerational tensions by stating

> Here I do not have the freedom. [I] have surrendered to the children. They feed me, but my hands and feet are tied.—Ranil

These negative experiences were conceptualized as suffering. However, the yearning for former autonomy, roles, and status as patriarchs and matriarchs was understood to have been caused by greed for materiality, control, power, status, and authority.

The Buddhist concept of impermanence allowed participants to reframe stressful situations. Possessions, relationships, and life accomplishments, such as seniority and status within the intergenerational household and society, were understood as impermanent and destined to fade.

> There is an inevitable ending to your life. I don't have desires for material things. I [accept that I] must give up because everything you have you will leave [behind].—Ravi

This acceptance of impermanence allowed participants to react gracefully and cope when things that were once perceived as valuable and meaningful were lost to immigration.

Instead of feeling disempowered by a lack of control, participants found more acceptable reasons for why events occurred and what was responsible for their occurrence. The construct of karma was superimposed on the late-life immigration experience to explain stressors.

> I told the monk that I believe it is because of past bad karma that I am spending what little is remaining of my life in this hell.—Ranil

This attribution simultaneously engendered both a helpless orientation and acceptance; "What to do? This is our karma" (Manjula). These thoughts were tempered by attribution of positive aspects of late-life immigration to past good karma. Ranil deemed the access to quality health care in Canada to his past good deeds.

> I received care that even my children would not provide for me at home. I would come out [into the hospital corridor] at night because I couldn't fall asleep. I was amazed. I thought to myself that I must have done something good in a previous life to be fortunate enough to experience such care. – Ranil

The belief in karma expedited and intensified the concern to do good deeds, especially as participants grew aware of the finitude of time to make good karma; "our future depends on what we do now" (Kamal). They actively engaged in meritorious activities of generosity that were feasible given their circumstances; Geetha knit for charity, Vijith used home-grown vegetables to prepare food for the clergy, Manjula cleaned the temple and organized community gatherings, and two other participants offered to donate their bodies to research as a final act of generosity.

Meritorious acts were taken on to "emancipate" from Samsara to "release me from myself" (Apsara) as "Only if you have lived an exemplary life, and if you have done good deeds, will you [be reborn in a] good place." (Bandula). Moreover, these meritorious deeds dissipated anxieties surrounding their present and future lives, as they were believed to atone for and neutralize previous wrongdoings. Geetha was insistent on participating in the annual Katina ceremony, an immensely meritorious ritual involving offering a hand-sewn robe to monks who have completed a period of retreat (Wickremeratne, 2006). Despite her failing eyesight, which made the task of hand sewing both inefficient and unsafe, Geetha was determined to take part in this once-a-year opportunity, as it may be her last.

> I was at the Katina festival. A young lady told me 'Aunty, why are you tiring yourself? It's not good for you. Go sit for a while.' I told [her] 'what if I die [soon]?' Because one never knows if I will be around for next year's festival. I want to do as much as possible while I can. I cannot see well. So [I was] scared. I told [them to] do most of the robe and give me the last three inches. So then [even if I make a mistake] they can remove it. – Geetha

Thus, the understanding that current actions influence future situations equipped participants with a sense of control over their present and future lives.

Non-Attachment

Non-attachment seemed paradoxical, as participants cited family reunification, interdependence, better amenities, and "material luxuries" as reasons for immigration in later life. Participants gradually came to accept that suffering emerged from the fixation on or attachment to external agents, including material possessions, relationships, and even statuses. They reasoned that these attachments fail to align with the dynamic nature of reality. Meditation led participants to gain insight into their attachments. They practiced non-attachment to remove themselves from these sources of stress.

> I realized how impermanent all things are. We must let go of these personal desires and attachments and get accustomed to living a simple life. There shouldn't be desires for clothing or food, any more than is necessary. In old age we must cast aside our cravings for things. That is what is taught in Buddhism. So, I gave away everything. We must not cling onto anything. That is deliverance. – Bandula

This reconceptualization mitigated stressors, eased adaptation to constraints imposed upon them, and served as a tool for healing and resiliency in the post-migration context.

> In Sri Lanka, I was 80% concentrating on social work. I was sort of a leader there and a lot of responsibility was cast on me. The neighbourhood monk had a lot of faith in me and entrusted me to lead the others. But here [my services] are not required. In Canada, there are lot of intelligent people who can take that responsibility. – Ravi

Participants also adapted to the erosion of traditional power and authority within the family structure experienced in Canada by renouncing self-importance.

> Until I came here, I have been taking the initiative in everything myself. This is a sudden change. Ninety-nine percent [of] my independence is curtailed because you have to go by the whims and fancies of the children whom you are depending on. Initially it hurt a lot. I have adapted by not thinking of my importance. There is a point when you have to give up your authority. – Ravi

In addition to maintaining harmony in the intergenerational household, participants' resigned acceptance and adaptation within the intergenerational home was a means to self-regulate and cope. Male participants, who were patriarchs in their former homes, detached from the need for "high authority" (Saman) within the household and transformed their self-perceptions from patriarch to "just one of the occupants of the home" (Saman). Thus, guided by Buddhist teachings, participants sought to surrender "craving" for transitory pleasures and material objects and in so doing adapted to the constraints imposed upon them by their circumstances.

Connecting to their Pasts and to the Ethnoreligious Community

Participants felt out of place following immigration.

> I have lived in Sri Lanka since the day I was born. I had the feeling that the environment is my own. I do not have that feeling here.—Sujatha.

The dissonant practices of the foreign context and participants' disorientation hindered social connectedness, inhibited independence, and encumbered engagement in mundane activities. They found themselves deprived of the regular social interactions and pleasantries that took place in Sri Lanka. Saman expressed, "I have cobwebs in my mouth", an allusion to how rarely he interacted with others. This sense of outsiderness, loneliness, and isolation even extended to the intergenerational home as participants struggled to keep abreast of the Westernization of younger generations.

Participants strategically recreated a pseudo-Sri Lanka through engagement in religious spaces and activities. Spiritual reminders, such as statues, chants, and offerings of incense, flowers and food to the Buddha, connected past and present experiences of home to lessen participants' sense of displacement.

> On my very first morning [in Canada], I heard the sound of the drums. I thought a temple must be close-by. But then I saw that my daughter had put Buddhist chants [on the stereo]. I was feeling homesick. Hearing Buddhist chants made me so happy. – Geetha

The Buddhist identity, expressed through participation in religious events, displays of religious symbols, and donning of cultural clothing, granted continuity between the past and present. For Ravi, the display of Vesak lanterns, an artefact unique to Sri Lankan Buddhists, served as a badge of ethnoreligious identity.

> When I display this in front of the house so many who are passing through admire it. A lot of non-Sri Lankans stare at the beauty of it. So that gives a little pride…like you are representing. – Ravi

Involvement in organized religious activities provided an important social context in which friendships and supportive exchanges were built and strengthened. At the temple, participants described a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling of being valued and protected, and of being "at home". The familiar and shared vernacular, cultural practices and value systems, constant elements that existed both before and after the experience of immigration, allowed participants to transcend their present social, physical, and cultural location and transform it to one that was reminiscent of home.

> On [Sinhalese] new year, everyone comes to the temple with delicacies. [The food] is spread down a long table. It is a joyous moment. We all fill our stomachs before we sit down for religious observance.—Sujatha

The nostalgia invited instinctual and authentic ways of knowing and doing everyday life.

> The temple is a place that I am accustomed to. Sinhala people that live in Canada have similar likes and dislikes. We behave in a similar way. I feel an amazing sense of relief. I think that the disposition that I had in Sri Lanka comes to the surface. – Bandula

Collective religious engagement also facilitated the exploration of joys, difficulties, and questions related to the spiritual journey.

> On Poya days [full moon days], I make arrangements [to go to temple]. We are at the temple by eight thirty till six in the evening. We spend the time abiding the precepts and socializing with other patrons. It became a thing which brought much calmness both to my mind as well as to my body. – Bandula

The cultural and religious traditions within the temple, particularly the reverence of elders, facilitated reassertion, restoration, and revival of their former identities.

> Once a month there is a Senior's Day at the temple. On this day we get the opportunity to get involved in games, discussions, and singing. We recite poems [and] describe experiences we have encountered during our lives. [We] also get into heated debates. So, this has become a very sociable opportunity. – Bandula

Despite his anonymity and obscurity in mainstream Canadian society, Vijith's wisdom and experience was recognized within the ethnoreligious community when he was asked to lead young Buddhists in building lanterns for the annual Vesak celebration. The temple became an instrument of power and inclusion where late-life immigrants intrepidly embraced their authentic selves.

Moreover, the collective religious engagement forged relationships that linked together their homeland and country of settlement. The ethnoreligious community taught participants the rules of engagement in the new society and connected them to community resources. Same-aged peers, who themselves had experienced immigration, shared experiences and insights to problem solve the challenges experienced in the post-migration context.

> When we meet our own community, this is a very enjoyable time. We discuss our day-to-day lives and about our experiences in this country. We joke, laugh, and make life [a] little more interesting. It's a break in life.—Ravi.

Socialization fortified participants' sense of belonging and fostered solidarity based on unities of history, interests, and objectives.

Discussion

A small, but growing, group of older adults are confronting stressors of ageing and migration simultaneously. Following immigration, the once taken-for-granted assumptions about who they are and how they fit into the social world become inadequate. Buddhism enabled the participants in this study to stand resolute amid the adversities of late-life immigration by facilitating purpose, meaning making, non-attachment, and connectedness.

Whereas predominant thought systems in the West define stressors as events external to the individual (Chen, 2006), participants in this study located the primary source of stress and suffering within themselves. The goal of coping, informed by Buddhism, was not stress reduction but rather the modification of its source, via personal transformation through religious engagement. Participants had a reservoir of religious resources to cultivate the mental discipline necessary to cope. Although coping with suffering is a legitimate goal of Buddhism, coping with daily stress is not (Chen, 2006). For participants, religious coping methods existed in a state of latency, only coming to the fore once confronted with the bewildering experience of loss, separation, and disorientation following immigration in late life. The materialization of Buddhism, from being the taken-for-granted tradition into becoming a cogent set of beliefs and practices following immigration, has also been recognized by Chen (2008), albeit with younger (35–55-year old) Taiwanese immigrants in the United States. Chen attributed this materialization to the ethnic, racial, and religious pluralism encountered in the post-migration context. Whereas the demarcation of a Buddhist identity was salient in overcoming the threatened and forfeited state of their former identities, the resurgence of religion was far more complex and multifaceted for late-life immigrants. The "double jeopardy" of being an older adult and an immigrant place late-life immigrants at risk of social disadvantage (Litwin & Leshem, 2008, p. 904). Under uncontrollable stressors and limited personal resources, religion, "a relatively

available part of the orienting system", became "a relatively compelling way of coping" (Pargament, 1997, p. 144). These findings align with the contention that vulnerable and disenfranchised groups turn towards religious coping (Pargament, 1997).

Participants became acutely aware of their religious roots and actively engaged in religious practices in the wake of immigration. This is supported by Smith (1978) who refers to immigration as a "theologizing" experience that enhances the spiritual consciousness and, consequently, religious participation of immigrants (Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003). Devoid of many former obligations and without the same settlement pressures of younger immigrants, participants engaged in Buddhist practices to stay occupied and to further spiritual aspirations.

Religious engagement directed participants' energies in a constructive and meaningful way, distracting them from stressors experienced in the post-migration context. Religious distraction has been identified as a positive religious coping method (Pargament et al., 2004). Similarly, Koenig et al. (1988) found that older adults commonly employed behaviours that distracted their attention and thoughts from the stressful problem by engaging in pleasurable or productive activities. Other scholars (Chan, Michalak, & Ybarra, 2019; Chen, 2008) also support religious engagement as a means through which one derives purpose. Although the resurgence of religiosity began as way to feel better, this objective was soon replaced with spiritual liberation. By serendipitously progressing towards enlightenment, religious engagement provided a purpose larger than distraction and engagement. Thus, coping was the byproduct of religious engagement; "The Buddhist approach to coping with suffering is an end in itself rather than a means to curing and healing" (Chen, 2006, p. 89). This finding illustrates the reciprocal and bidirectional relationship between coping and religion (Pargament et al., 1992). Buddhism shaped the character of late-life immigration, coping activities, and outcome. Simultaneously, coping and crises facilitated and shaped spiritual growth. The complex intersections of coping, religiosity, and spiritual growth warrant further scholarly attention.

Buddhism provided participants with the vocabulary to express experiences and construe meaning, allowing them to filter, select, and identify perceptions and understandings of stress. Limitations to autonomy, and the loneliness and exclusion experienced following immigration, were interpreted as stressors. By placing stress within the context of suffering, late-life immigrants rationalized and coexisted with stress, rendering it more endurable. Perception of suffering as impermanent gave hope that stressful circumstances would eventually change. The concept of karma helped participants foster a sense of individual responsibility for their stress and a sense of personal agency to address it (Xu, 2019). The elderly Indian immigrant women in Acharya and Northcott's (2007) study used karma, a concept also prevalent in Hindu discourse, to accept their life circumstances and develop deliberate responses to stressors in the host country. When viewed as being within the internal locus of control, karma is a positive coping method (Phillips et al., 2012). Buddhist reframing of stressful events using religious concepts has been supported by other scholars (Cassaniti, 2006; de Silva, 2006). The "explanatory power" (Xu, 2019, p. 8) of Buddhist constructs give individuals "interpretive control" (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982, p. 24), allowing them to better understand spiritual truths and, in turn, alleviate suffering. Thus, "religious reframing" (Pargament, 1997, pp. 221–232) transforms stressful situations into acceptable experiences.

The participants practiced non-attachment to egoistic pursuits, which allowed them to remove themselves from stressful experiences. When participants were no longer fixated on needing experiences to be one way or another, they were able to experience well-being independently of external circumstances. Scholars have shown that non-attachment is positively correlated with positive emotions, including life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Sahdra, Shaver, & Brown, 2010; Wang, Wong, & Yeh, 2016), and negatively correlated with negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Sahdra et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016). Further research on non-attachment may enhance the understanding of coping, particularly among Buddhist older adults confronting various challenging life experiences.

For participants, religious spaces and places were sanctuaries reminiscent of home. At the temple, participants' senses were flooded with reminders of the homeland. Nostalgia through recreation of familiar engagement in rituals and practices transcended immigrants' social, cultural, and physical dislocation and facilitated place continuity. Huynh (2000) observed that the Buddhist temple forms a space for Vietnamese immigrants to "recreate a Vietnam"— a home away from home. Similarly, studies involving other religions (e.g. Fresnoza-Flot, 2010; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009) have similarly found that religious spaces and communities recreate a familiar social space to provide immigrants with place attachment and sense of belonging, to confront the precariousness of their lives and attenuate the disjuncture of place experienced following late-life immigration.

The temple and the ethnoreligious community reinforced community relations and supported late-life immigrants' social incorporation into a valued collective. The ethnoreligious community facilitates participants' social mobility, leadership, community service, and respect beyond what was available or possible in the broader community, to create a sense of belonging in the host country. By providing a social space for immigrants to gather and engage in religious services, the temple facilitated informal networks that enhanced their knowledge of, and access to, services essential to settlement. This study also found that the ethnoreligious community directly contributed to participants' coping process by supporting participants in relating religious teachings to the immigration experience, and thus activating and cultivating their religious mechanisms to cope with late-life immigration stressors. Similarly, Lee (2007) highlighted the potential protective factor of the religious community: that maintaining social relationships in a shared place of worship alleviated depressive symptoms for elderly Chinese and Korean American immigrants who faced difficulties in coping with health issues, immigration, and acculturation stress, and diminishing social resources.

Implications

By attending to older immigrants' religious world-views and how these intersect with these immigrants' post-migration well-being, helping professionals, including health care providers, social service providers, and settlement and integration services, can mobilize and optimize positive religious resources. Potential directions involve supporting late-life immigrants' inherent strength of making use of pre-existing religious beliefs and forms of engagement as a means to cope, and incorporating religious sensitivity into support programs to address the specific needs of the migrated religious elderly.

Increasing access to social, religious, and cultural resources in the community promoted late-life immigrants' sense of belongingness, meaning, and connection. Outreach to, and collaboration with, religious communities can be an essential tool in increasing the efficacy of services and accessing the inherent strengths and resiliency of ethnoreligious communities (Lee & Chan, 2009). In recognizing ethnoreligious communities as potential lifelines for late-life immigrants, research, health, and integration services can collaborate with religious communities in mitigating age-related and migration stressors to equip congregants to use religious resources to buffer stress. Such collaborations can increase access to minority, marginalized, and disenfranchised older adults, and enhance the efficacy of services, particularly to those who under-utilize mainstream services. Finally, considering these immigrants' significant economic contributions to Canadian society as well as their often overlooked non-economic contributions (Vanderplaat, Ramos, & Yoshida, 2013), decision makers must invest in meaningfully anchoring late-life immigrants to Canadian society by providing supportive services.

Limitations

Although efforts were made to recruit a religiously diverse sample, the small pool of Sri Lankan-Buddhist late-life immigrants from Sri Lanka residing in the GTA, and their obscurity, made recruitment challenging. Participants of this study attended the same ethnic and religious spaces and events, furthering the exposure to, and nurturance of, similar beliefs and ideals. Therefore, the findings of this study point to a culturally and religiously defined perspective of coping by a niche group of late-life immigrants. It is conceivable that recruitment from a larger, more dispersed ethnic minority and different religious groups may have introduced alternative experiences of coping following late-life immigration.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study conducted with Sri Lankan-born Buddhist late-life immigrants reveals how religious engagement facilitated purpose, meaning making, non-attachment, and connectedness, allowing late-life immigrants to cope with the limitations, losses, and difficulties inherent in the late-life immigration process. Following late-life immigration, the pursuit of enlightenment became a preoccupation and distraction from the loss of the material and relational familiarity of their homeland. Participants used Buddhist concepts to interpret stressful events and reframe outlooks into those that were more pragmatic. Non-attachment removed participants from sources of stress. Religious engagement facilitated connection with one's past and with others, to recreate a sense of home in Canada and mitigate the disjuncture of place. In doing so, Buddhist-oriented coping helped keep participants buoyant amidst the turmoil of late-life immigration. Considering that the number of immigrants is likely to increase and to contribute to Canada's religious plurality, it is critical for future studies to examine the intersection of religion and immigration of late-life immigrants.

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