Author’s response to reviews

Title: School Factors Related to the Emotional Wellbeing and Resettlement Outcomes of Students from Refugee Backgrounds: Protocol for a Systematic Review

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Reviewer 1

A well written paper which outlines an important aspect of refugee research that is currently lacking. The authors have highlighted areas that require further research and investigation, which will be beneficial for other researchers to note when embarking on projects to fill these gaps in the literature.

1. I'm not sure if this paper was written with the sole purpose of suggesting a protocol for systematic review in this area, because there is no information provided on the findings of the systematic review or a discussion section with reference to the research questions. Is there a section missing in the manuscript or would there be a follow-up to this initial write-up?

Response: This paper is a protocol for a systematic review. The systematic review has not yet been completed, and as such there are no findings to be discussed as yet. The completed systematic review paper will follow this protocol paper.

Some additional comments:
2. Line 90-93: 'Key attributes of a healthy school climate include that it is a safe place with clear rules, respects diversity, is assertive in preventing and responding to bullying, and fosters healthy relationships between students, teachers and parents.' - has this been recommended in previous literature, or is this proposed by the authors?

Response: Lines 90-93 paraphrase the National School Climate Council’s definition of ‘a positive and sustained school climate’. This definition is used in the Thapa and colleagues (2013) review of school climate research and is further bolstered by research completed by Bear and colleagues (2016) on the Delaware School Climate Survey (DSCS). The referencing of lines 89–93 have been updated to clarify the definition and references used.

3. The objectives and methodological parameters (inclusion and exclusion criteria) are very well defined. The authors have undertaken a very comprehensive process of data collection and analysis.

Response: Thank you

4. Line 217: ‘all non-English language papers will be identified and informally translated using an online platform’ - it would be helpful to other researchers to provide further information on these platforms, and the quality of translation provided.

Response: If there are no existing translations of the non-English language papers, Google Translate will be used to guide us in the first instance as to whether the subject area is aligned with our question and if so then we will seek more formal translation. Lines 242–244 have been updated to reflect this clarification. We recognize the limitations of Google Translate in producing exact translations, however given the multicultural nature of the field we believe it is important to include non-English studies. In the systematic review paper that will follow this paper, we will acknowledge where Google Translate has been used.

5. Line 224 to 225: Is there information missing within the sentence?

Response: These lines contained a mistake, and have been corrected in the manuscript. The sentence has been changed to: “We anticipate that excluding refugee camp settings will result in an analysis of studies predominantly from middle- and high-income countries. However there are no formal eligibility criteria excluding specific countries of resettlement.”
Reviewer #2:

The authors are applauded for addressing an important gap in the existing literature. Political upheaval and war has pushed people out of their homelands. Many seek refuge in Western countries. Cultural diversity is on an increase in the schools in the Western countries. We are seeing an increase in the number of children from refugee backgrounds entering school systems. Children spend a substantial amount of time at school. Therefore, schools can pay an important role is the health and wellbeing of children from the refugee background.

Strengths of the protocol

The authors have justified the aim of the review effectively. The concepts examined are interesting and the outcome will be valuable for researchers and practitioners. Methodology: PRISMA principles are proposed and methodology is rigorous. Multiple steps proposed to short list the studies are effective. Population is defined clearly. Design of the studies, which will be shortlisted, is pointed out. Setting is defined. Information sources are adequate and grey literature is included. Robust measures are proposed to determine the quality of the short listed studies. Search terms fall in three categories. Studies selected will be reviewed by independent raters and ambiguities will be discussed and resolved. In my view the qualitative synthesis proposed by the authors will be appropriate.

Response: Thank you

Suggestions:

1. The authors refer to "school climate" and "school environment". Later these terms are defined as "Institutional norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe". Authors elaborate this notion as a safe place with clear rules, respect or diversity and a school system that prevents bullying and foster health relationships. Later on page 8 school climate is operationalized as "school belongingness, school connectedness, teacher-student relationship, teacher-parent relationship, teaching style, school leadership, class size, attendance, bullying, peer relationships, school safety, diversity, cultural attitude, parent engagement." My concern is the shift in the definition of school climate from page 4 to 8. Further, I am wondering is such a broader definition would hinder the process.

Response: Thank you for this suggestion. We have refined the definition and referencing of ‘school climate’ on page 4, to clarify queries by both reviewers. We have also edited the manuscript to use ‘school climate’ only when referring to the construct of interest, rather than the unclear, interchangeable use of ‘school climate’ and ‘school environment’. We have also made the following changes to the operationalization of school climate (p7) to maintain consistency
with the definition: “School climate factors include any item that measures a key factor associated with school experience, for example institutional norms, values, expectations, approaches to diversity, bullying, or relationships between peers and/ or teachers.

With regards to the school climate construct we agree with the reviewer that the definition of school climate is broad. Based on our knowledge of the literature regarding schools and refugee students, we believe it necessary to keep the definition of the construct broad to allow for a comprehensive and effective review.

As discussed in the ‘Background’ section (lines 108 – 119), while many studies have taken up the question of refugee adaptation to the school environment, the inquiries have been methodologically heterogeneous and investigated numerous and disparate school factors.

The school is a dynamic environment, and the surrounding literature in the general school population reflects these many variables. For example, the Delaware School Climate Survey (Bear et al 2016), a widely used and validated measure, contains the following subscales: School Safety, Fairness of Rules, Clarity of Expectations, Bullying Schoolwide, Teacher-Student Relations, Student-Student Relations, Teacher-Home Communications, and Student Engagement. These subscales are scored and summed to result in a ‘Total School Climate’ score. This disparate operationalization of the construct is also evident in the extant refugee school research. For example, Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) explored refugee students’ self-reported sense of school belonging, Kovacev and Shute (2004) explored support from classmates as a key school climate factor, and in research by Correa-Velez and colleagues (2010) school experience was investigated using refugee students’ experience of discrimination. All of these school factors were linked to improved or worsened psychological outcomes. We believe the current definition is representative of the breadth of factors studied in the school context.

This systematic review aims to be a critical synthesis of the field. As such a broad definition is necessitated in order to collate and review studies that investigate the many different subsections of school factors. We do agree with the reviewer that the broad definition might ‘hinder’ the process, in that it might expand the scope of studies included. We believe that the qualitative narrative methodology will allow the authors to manage the variance in the data, and create main themes for the reader.

2. Further, some of the factors would be beneficial for all students (we know a lot about these factors). I would advise the authors to focus more on specific factors that would advantage the children from refugee background.

Response: We agree with the reviewer that it is important to focus on factors that advantage children from refugee backgrounds. One of the stated objectives of the review is to identify factors specific to refugee students: “Compared to the general school population, which school
factors are of unique relevance to the wellbeing and resettlement of students from refugee backgrounds?" (lines 154-155). However, as we do not yet know which specific factors uniquely advantage refugee students over the general population, all studies that review refugee student populations in the school context are to be included. Collating these factors and proposing a typology of general and refugee-specific factors in the definitive review will be an important outcome.

3. Wellbeing is defined as "mental health, acculturation, adjustment, subjective wellbeing and happiness". Again, the definition is broad and I am concerned about its impact on the process of the review.

Response: We have amended our wellbeing outcomes to ‘mental disorders, subjective wellbeing, or psychosocial adjustment’ (lines 210-212). While these outcomes remain relatively broad, as with our definition/ operationalization of ‘school climate’, we believe the wellbeing outcomes need to be inclusive to reflect the state of the literature. In high income countries such as the United States, studies of the general student population have consistently linked a positive school climate to student wellbeing across a range of academic, behavioural, and socio-emotional outcomes. And given we are reviewing studies of the international refugee population, we believe that to restrict outcomes to predominantly western constructs of mental health (for example, DSM diagnoses) would risk biasing the review. Further, this review is not focused on psychological interventions within schools, which might allow a narrower definition of mental health outcomes. As discussed in our background section (lines 72 – 88), most schools do not have the resources to implement clinical interventions led by mental health professionals.

As the field of refugee wellbeing in schools is relatively emergent, heterogeneous, and the research yet to be synthesized, we believe that a broad definition of wellbeing that includes both clinical and subjective indicators of wellbeing would best capture the required studies. In the following systematic review paper we will discuss the issue of broad search terms as a limitation, as highlighted by the reviewer.

4. In the introduction the authors focus on children from refugee background. Later they indicate that studies examining the school's relationship with the parents will be included as well. Considering that the definition is already very broad, my suggestion would be to focus on children only. To my understanding studies focusing on parents can act as a data for another review.

Response: Thank you for this suggestion. We have now removed the parent data from the protocol. This review will now focus exclusively on children’s experience of school and their
outcomes. Edits have been made to the manuscript to reflect this change (see track changes throughout).

5. In summary, the goal of the review is valuable. Procedure adopted to short list the studies is effective. My only concern is related to the broad interpretation of "school climate" and "wellbeing". I am unclear how the search terms will capture the relevant studies. I would suggest that authors to reconsider how they would translate the broader definitions of the main concepts into search terms.

Response: We agree that the inclusive definitions of ‘school climate’ and ‘wellbeing’ create complexity in generating the search terms. As per PRISMA recommendations we engaged a research librarian with expertise in systematic reviews (author LH). Because the field contains so many varying factors/outcomes, LH advised the team to keep the search terms broad and simple in order to capture all potentially relevant studies. As such we created a search strategy with basic keywords that would return all studies of relevance to our key areas of interest: ‘refugee students’ and ‘school climate’. For example, to capture the ‘school climate’ studies we use the broad terms ‘schools’, ‘education’, ‘students’ and so forth as keywords, and as title and abstract searches. Based on pilot searches, all studies investigating some relevant element of ‘school climate’ include these words as either keywords, or in the title or abstract. Using these basic terms was more inclusive than if we were to list each potential school factor as a keyword. We used the same strategy for the ‘refugee’ and ‘child’ search terms (please note, the search terms relevant to parents have been removed). Based on these combined categories, any paper that contains references to both schools or to refugee children will be returned. LH advised that this simple strategy is a more effective and economical, particularly when employed across six different databases. This approach was confirmed through extensive piloting of the search term groupings.

The decision to omit outcome factor search terms was made with the same rationale: that it is better to return more inclusive search results. Because of the breadth of potential outcomes and exploratory nature of the study, to include outcome keyword searches would risk excluding some relevant papers. We believe the presented search strategy will be more inclusive, and capture all studies that are concerned with refugees and schools. The onus is then on the two individual reviewers to determine which studies meet our review inclusion criteria.