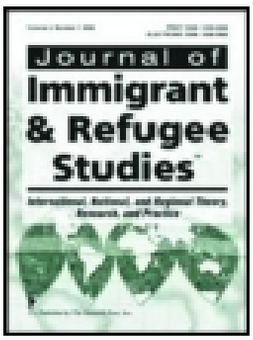

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Exploring the Practices of Refugee Settlement Practitioners in Toronto: An Institutional Ethnography

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ABSTRACT

Using Institutional Ethnography as a method of inquiry, this study explores the institutional ruling relations that regulate refugees' settlement process in Toronto from the standpoint view of practitioners. The research team conducted 13 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with practitioners and "mapped out" their everyday living experiences. The institutional map serves to illuminate how governance structures shape the professional practices of practitioners, which shape the settlement experience of refugees. The findings indicate that practitioners strategize to meet refugees' needs and engage in work outside of the system due to funding constraints.

KEYWORDS

Settlement institution; practitioners; funding constraints; institutional ethnography; ruling relations

Introduction

Settlement service organizations play an essential role in supporting newcomers to Canada (Shields et al., 2016); however, the processes that practitioners engage in when working with people navigating the refugee system remain understudied. Baffoe (2013) and Lacroix et al. (2015) critique the lack of attention paid to this navigation process and question the deficit-based approaches to service delivery that many settlement programs and agencies adopt when dealing with refugees. These approaches are often demeaning and make access to settlement services more ambiguous and confusing for refugees and newcomers alike. This article addresses the scarcity of knowledge and discusses the institutional ruling relations that regulate the settlement process for refugees in Toronto, Canada – from practitioners' standpoint.

Background

Canada ratified the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating the Status of Refugees and the 1967 protocol (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). The convention recognizes a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). The global perception of Canada is that it is a humanitarian and compassionate haven for refugees (Arbel & Brenner, 2013; Atak et al., 2018; Hari, 2014), and the Canadian government echoes this perception by asserting that Canada's refugee system is leading in generosity (Arbel & Brenner, 2013). However, Canada's refugee system has met critique, such as the determination process that has resulted in accelerated timelines for determining protection (Atak et al., 2018; Vineberg, 2018). The process mentioned

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above can increase the rejection of legitimate refugee cases, add undue pressure to legal aid programs, and make it difficult for refugee claimants to secure legal representation (Atak et al., 2018). On the other hand, refugee claims have remained looming for several years (Atak et al., 2018; Vineberg, 2018), in some cases leading to mental health challenges and long-lasting family separations (Atak et al., 2018).

The Canadian refugee system accepts asylum seekers' applications through two processes (Government of Canada, 2019). First, individuals can make refugee claims within Canada through the in-Canada Asylum Program (Government of Canada, 2019). Second, the Refugee and Humanitarian Settlement Program is in place for individuals residing abroad that need protection (Government of Canada, 2019). Refugees who need resettlement cannot submit applications directly to Canada; instead, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and private actors facilitate the refugee identification process (Government of Canada, 2019). Resettled refugees can enter this program via the following streams: Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), or through the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (Korntheuer et al., 2017). Canada resettled 28,000 refugees in 2018, making it the highest number of refugees resettled by the UNHCR that year (UNHCR, 2018).

In Canada, the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, community groups, and private actors support newcomers' settlement and integration, though their responsibilities differ (Tilson, 2010). In Ontario, the federal government is the primary funder for settlement and integration services, followed by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) (OAGC, 2017). However, the federal government predominantly covers permanent residents, while the MCI generally supports permanent residents, refugee claimants,[1] and Canadian citizens (OAGC, 2017). Individuals who meet the eligibility criteria can access a range of services, such as English as a Second Language (ESL or LINC), assistance finding a job, and information orientation (OCASI, 2018).

Integration into a host country is a combination of individual and structural factors, including language learning, employment, housing, healthcare, and social networks (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hynie, 2018; Korntheuer et al., 2017). An individual's settlement and integration experience vary according to how they entered the country (Korntheuer et al., 2017). For example, resettled refugees are permanent residents upon arrival and are immediately entitled to services and benefits affiliated with permanent residency. However, refugee claimants must navigate an uncertain process with minimal support before receiving permanent resident status, if granted status at all (Campbell et al., 2014; Korntheuer et al., 2017; Olsen et al., 2016).

The existing literature on refugee integration in Canada predominantly focuses on mental health, access to healthcare, civic participation, and community engagement (Baffoe, 2013; Campbell et al., 2014; Edge et al., 2014; Hynie, 2018; Newbold et al., 2013; Patil et al., 2015; Shannon et al., 2016). Limited literature focuses on settlement service organizations regarding bridging refugees to services and supports necessary for integration (Lacroix et al., 2015). Several articles discuss refugees' experiences, allowing a discussion about how settlement organizations can effectively meet their needs (Campbell et al., 2014; George, 2002; Nakhaie, 2018). There have also been discussions regarding resilience and refugees navigating the settlement institution (Bajwa et al., 2019 ;Beiser et al., 2015). Few articles build on practitioners' wisdom and voices to explore the institutional processes via their standpoint positions (Smith, 1987, 1990, 2005).[2]

Theoretical framework

This article is framed by critical management theory (Hancock & Tyler, 2004) to examine the relationship between institutions and their operations. Critical management studies (CMS) offers an opportunity to explore how the settlement sector has been shaped and constructed by institutional priorities and how practitioners and organizations carry out the priorities. CMS is not

interested in the individual shortcomings of a practitioner or [settlement] organizations; instead, it seeks to uncover and highlight the various social inequalities that they carry out (Adler et al., 2007). This article utilizes CMS to examine how institutional practices and discourses manifest into organizational structures and practices.

According to Hancock and Tyler (2004), CMS interrogates the "organizational power relations to shape social identities and the lived experiences of organizational life" (p. 620). CMS offers a way to critically examine power relations as they shape the social, political, and organizational processes. It also examines how power relations define and organize the everyday living of institutional practices and discourses. Spicer et al. (2009) assert that "it is these power relations that critical management studies (CMS) seek to examine and call into question" (p. 537). The authors add that CMS's primary role is to uncover and interrogate structures of oppression (Spicer et al., 2009).

CMS allows an examination of how identity and subjectivity issues are at the heart of how practitioners navigate their role in the settlement sector. This theoretically informed way helps to examine how institutions and institutional practices influence and shape organizational structures and how informants internalize them in their choices of delivering settlement services. Furthermore, CMS helps to distinguish how discourses are taken up by organizations and practitioners and examine the impacts on how they utilize services to operationalize and actualize their roles as practitioners.

Methodology

This article presents findings from the *Journey Home: Refugee Settlement and Integration* Project, which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (435-2017-0864) and approved by Ryerson University's Research Ethics Board (2017-149). The Journey Home Project is exploring the institutional factors that hinder and support refugees' settlement experiences in Toronto (Province of Ontario), Calgary (Province of Alberta), and Montreal (Province of Quebec). This article focuses on the professional practices of practitioners in Toronto and defines "practitioners" as someone who directly or indirectly influences the provision of settlement for refugees and newcomers alike.

This research study employs institutional ethnography (IE) as a method of inquiry, as developed by Dorothy E. Smith, who describes IE as a "sociology for the people" (Smith, 2005, p. 10). IE uses an ontological stance which requests research to start from the standpoint of individuals that are participating or implicated in a problematic; although it uses their reports to investigate an institution and practices, they are not the object of analysis (DeVault, 2006; Høgsbro, 2020; Kearney et al., 2019; Smith, 2005; Walby, 2013). Researchers interview informants because they are an entry point into an institution,[3] and they provide accounts on organizational processes (Walby, 2013). The aforesaid is consistent with the idea that what happens within an institution is not the product of an individual working within it, rather it is shaped by complex networks of "ruling relations" (Smith, 1995; Lane et al., 2010).

IE moves away from preconceived theorization and disciplinary conceptualization of understanding reality (Pence, 1996; Smith, 1990a, 2005). Instead, it moves toward researching how the everyday world is organized, how organizations are coordinated, and how activities and process interchanges are implemented – an ontological shift (Pence, 1996; Smith, 1990, 2005). Smith (2005) argues that IE concentrates on the social, which she understands as "how people's activities or practices are coordinated" (p. 59).

Trans-local forces shape and organize the everyday actions, decisions, and lives of people through texts, language, and discourses (DeVault, 2006; Deveau, 2009), described as the "ruling relations" by Dorothy E. Smith (1999, p. 49). Therefore, the text helps to develop an understanding of the institution's daily activities (DeVault, 2006; Smith, 1999). It examines how people are

Table 1. Participant Overview.

Informant Number	Institutional Role
Informant 1	Strategic Partnerships and Organizational Development
Informant 2	Intake and Client Engagement Lead
Informant 3	Executive Director
Informant 4	Settlement Worker in School (SWIS)
Informant 5	Immigration Counselor
Informant 6	Settlement Worker
Informant 7	Manager
Informant 8	Information and Referral Specialist
Informant 9	Lawyer
Informant 10	Outreach and Community Relations Coordinator
Informant 11	Community Development Officer
Informant 12	Settlement Worker
Informant 13	Employment Support Worker

organized, how they interpret and convey language, and how it is used to further an organization's goals – an ontology of the social (Doll & Walby, 2019; Smith, 2005, p. 59).

IE pays attention to the concept of work, which includes paid and unpaid work (DeVault, 2006). Smith (2005) defines works as "anything done by people that takes time and effort … It means much more than what is done on the job" (p. 151). Consistent with this description, it is key to question the concept of work as individuals negotiate and engage in invisibilized work to complete a job's formal component, such as administrative tasks (Hosken, 2018). Notwithstanding, IE is utilized as it provides researchers with an opportunity to visually map and understand what is happening in the practitioners' everyday living experience, making it easier to know how to create institutional change (Deveau, 2009).

Data collection began with the research team conducting an organizational scan and emailing organizations in Toronto. The research team scheduled in-person meetings with representatives from organizations that responded and some agreed to share recruitment material. Some practitioners who saw our initial email participated in interviews, and the research team also employed the snowballing process. Gaps in the map following the initial interviews led to strategic outreach. The research team conducted a follow-up interview to verify the preliminary map.

IE requires researchers to start in different locations, such as cities, to understand national practices and how they are extra locally predetermined (Høgsbro, 2020; Klostermann, 2020). Accordingly, interviews and focus groups were conducted in Toronto (Province of Ontario), Calgary (Province of Alberta), and Montreal (Province of Quebec). Over the three sites, 65 practitioners participated in 5 focus groups (30 informants), and 35 interviews (36 informants). This article draws on 13 semi-structured, in depth interviews (13 informants) with practitioners in Toronto. More specifically, one interview included two informants, and one interview was a follow-up interview with two informants. The interviews took place between December 2017 and June 2018. Table 1 outlines the order in which the informants were interviewed and the roles that they held:

This study incorporated the participation of individuals situated in numerous positions and levels because IE is interested in moving "beyond the interchanges of frontline settings to track the macroinstitutional policies and practices that organize those local settings" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 29). The informants are from nine different organizations. Amongst the informants, there were representatives from nonprofits and charitable organizations, and the municipal government.

The research team listened to the audio recordings and reviewed the interview notes to develop the institutional map. Mapping institutional processes is specific to IE; it allows researchers to assemble complex data beyond the official chart structures. An institutional map was developed using the online diagraming software, Lucidchart, and recreated a small section (Figure 1)

for this article using Venngage infographic software. The workers' everyday practices were mapped; additionally, labels were included in the map to indicate text that guides the practitioners' work. After developing the map, the research team reviewed the audio recordings again and selectively transcribed and coded data using NVivo 11.

Given that the study incorporated various roles, the findings are broad in scope. A more focused look at each area of the settlement processes will be helpful. It will also be useful to map out this process with refugees to understand how they navigate the settlement process, using their standpoint.

Findings

Mapping the way

This study applied the mapping process to illuminate a snapshot of practitioners' everyday practices in the settlement institution. More specifically, the research team mapped out several entry points into the settlement institution in Toronto. While some entry points will be discussed throughout this article, just a small piece of the map has been included to illustrate the mapping process (Figure 1). Figure 1 is a small section of the map highlighting practitioners' professional practices when a service user enters the settlement institution via a settlement agency. The map has text boxes with unique borders to indicate the following: the professional practices are in solid lines, considerations and notes made by informants are in long dashes, and examples of program and services that service users can be referred to are in dotted lines. Lastly, the arrows represent the referral process.

The practitioners stated that settlement organizations actively engage in outreach strategies, such as sharing brochures and networking. However, referrals from friends and family are the primary way in which refugees connect with services. The following entry points into the settlement institution were mapped out: (1) settlement agencies (Figure 1 outlines practices carried out by practitioners via this entry point); (2) a child or youth enrolling in school and engaging with settlement workers in schools (SWIS); (3) the library settlement program (LSP); and (4) information and orientation kiosks. However, this section focuses on the first and second entry points.

The practitioner's initial task at settlement agencies is to understand the service user's needs. An understanding of needs is most often done conversationally using a needs assessment tool, which is reflective of a reporting requirement by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). However, several informants stated that before assessing the service users' needs, they need to make them feel welcomed and establish trust and rapport. After assessing the needs, practitioners develop a priority order and begin referring refugees to services. Although practitioners can address some needs on the spot (e.g. registering for legal aid and financial assistance), many needs require an internal or external referral (refer to 1.5 in Figure 1).

When practitioners select organizations for referrals, consideration is given to the organization's capacity to meet the needs and the service users' proximity to the organization (Figure 1 notes other considerations). A recognized challenge of external referrals is the frequent need to repeat the intake process, which can be both time and energy-consuming for service users (Figure 1 depicts the cycle of referrals to different agencies and services). Practitioners make referrals to a vast array of services, including housing, financial aid, legal aid, employment support, education support, mental health, physical health, and recreational groups. These services may also carry out referrals to other services.

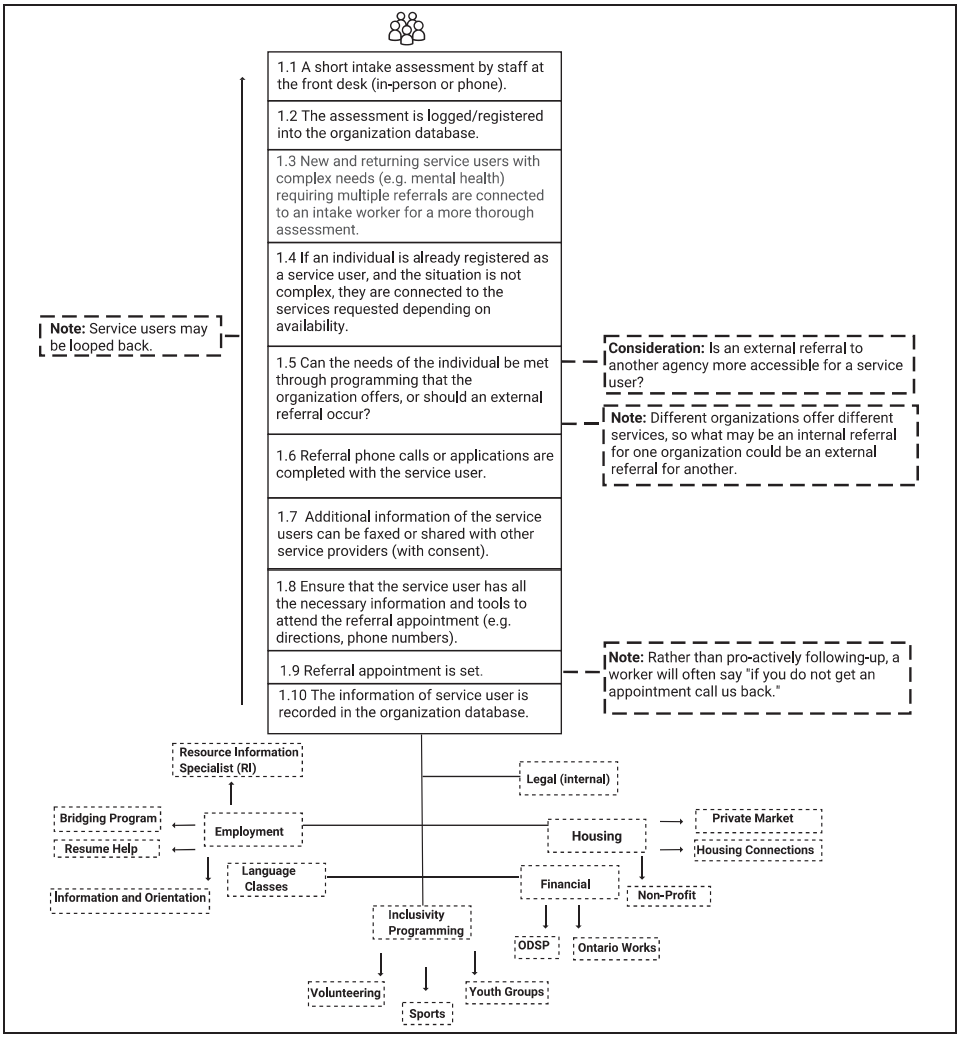

Figure 1. Entering settlement agencies.

A SWIS worker's practices were also mapped out, noting that this section of the map is not included in this article. SWIS workers are federally funded to support permanent residents and convention refugees and are generally not funded to serve refugee claimants, Canadian citizens, or illegalized immigrants. After meeting with eligible service users, SWIS workers report the meeting to the funder via the Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (ICARE), which is a federal database (must include a permanent resident number and date of birth). SWIS workers may be able to report meetings with refugee claims, Canadian citizens, or illegalized immigrants via the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP), depending on the organization's funding. The SWIS worker spoke about supporting service users, even if they are not eligible and irrespective of the fact that they have a target that they must meet. The SWIS worker stated that they do not report the ineligible service users to the funder.

> When you have a specific number you have to reach you have to take care of the quality of the service, you have to take care of your reputation, and the agency reputation … and with the government's goal, right? … We have to serve people with permanent resident and convention refugee. Those we can report them to the [funder] because they have PR number. … But trust me sometimes I serve like more than that like refugee claimants, or work permit or citizen. (Informant 4, SWIS)

Major themes

The findings indicate that practitioners strategize and engage in work outside of the system to meet refugees and newcomers' vast needs. Strategies include identifying and responding to diverse needs, maintaining knowledge of other practitioners, and establishing connections both in and external to the settlement sector. Practitioners' responsibility to achieve the expectations mentioned above is coupled with their obligation to service funders' requirements. Despite informants' awareness of their roles and responsibilities that are internal to their respective organizations, they spoke about the conflict they faced when the constraints of the settlement institution prevented the provision of adequate support. The conflict described above often resulted in acts of resistance to prioritize service users' needs over the security and stability of the practitioners' position or organization.

Identifying and responding to needs

Most of the organizations participating in this study operate using a standardized needs assessment framework aligned with federal reporting requirements outlined in ICARE. The needs assessment, coupled with the basic profile information of newcomers, informs subsequent service delivery. The prioritization of specific needs over others is at the discretion of practitioners and informed by their knowledge of the settlement process. Informants stated that the decision of which needs to prioritize depends on various factors such as location, community, country of origin, and language proficiency. An informant said: "if they are new in the country … you know they can't go enrol their children at school they need to have an address, right? So, finding home, opening a bank account … " (Informant 6, Settlement Worker).

Informants also discussed the best ways to organize services. An employment support worker spoke about their service provision role as secondary and expressed that the first contact point should always be a settlement worker.

> I'm the employment support worker, but I try not to see them as a first contact. I try to get them to go through a settlement worker first. … Settlement agencies are the backbone, but within the settlement agencies are the settlement workers that are the backbone, right? They should be the first contact to make sure they have all their information and stuff settled, right? To make sure that they have everything and then they can refer within the agency to employment, mentorship, language … it's kind of like a trickling effect. (Informant 13, Employment Support Worker)

An informant spoke about what they called "the number game," referring to the fact that a higher number of service users often correlates to more significant funding, which at times has complicated the decision of whether to refer internally versus externally.

> That's too far for them actually … So, you have to figure out what is going on here. … the number game actually also pushes agencies to do that. … We are following the client, so the client actually, wherever they are, we should actually have, at least give the choice. (Informant 1, Strategic Partnerships and Organization Development)

Comprehensive knowledge of the settlement sector

Practitioners must have extensive and up-to-date knowledge of the settlement sector to ensure that service users are referred to services that meet their needs. An informant spoke about the importance of knowing the eligibility criteria of each organization before making a referral. Eligibility criteria are imperative to ensure that a service user is not referred to an organization that cannot serve them and avoid having the service user be looped back (contributing the cycle of referrals depicted in Figure 1).

> We are kind of filtering – like when they come to us we know each organization's eligibility … somebody with high income, like, we are not going to refer them to [organization] … somebody comes in they say

> they want to go to [organization], but they are like over 65, so they are not accepting 65. (Informant 2, Intake and Client Engagement Lead)

Practitioners can use their knowledge of the sector to strategically develop relationships with organizations that might benefit from a collaborative service approach due to limited in-house service availability. Informants stated that sometimes they collaborate through a standard referral process, while other times, organizations may collaborate in a shared space, forming a service hub. An example of this occurred when Syrian refugees were housed in hotels immediately after arriving in Toronto, and practitioners were able to be on-site, providing comprehensive support.

> Sometimes we send people to shelters, so some of the shelters have the capacity to do a lot of things [lists organizations], but other shelters would not know what to do with the other stuff [referring to immigration support]. We would keep the client but refer them if they don't have housing. (Informant 5, Immigration Counsellor)

Collaboration, partnerships, and knowledge of existing services ensure a variety of options from which practitioners can draw support. Having multiple resources to draw on is important because it is unlikely that one practitioner can meet all refugees' needs accessing their services.

Funding governs service eligibility

A frequent theme was the impact that funding has on refugees' eligibility for services. IRCC, on behalf of the federal government, is responsible for funding a large portion of settlement services. However, IRCC specifically funds services for permanent residents and convention refugees, which excludes a large portion of Canada's newcomer population, leaving them without adequate support.

> We have clients with status other than permanent residents or convention refugees, so normally our services are funded by government for those specific groups, so those clients are a little challenging working with. We have other solutions, but it's not as much available for other status, so it's a little bit challenging, especially a new group of refugees which are refugee claimants, mostly. So, we have no English program for free, we have no, like, all those employment services available for them. So, they have to wait for like passing all those steps one by one, get work permit first, and then go for the next step to change the status. (Informant 12, Settlement Worker)

A review of public funding information of settlement service organizations in Toronto showed various funding sources from which an organization could potentially draw. However, each of these sources differs in terms of the total amount of funding offered, the application process and eligibility criteria for funding, organizational reporting requirements, and level of control retained by the funder over the funds' use. In some cases, organizations must complete an extensive application process for a minimal amount of funding; however, organizations may not have the time or capacity to apply for funding from multiple sources. An informant stated, "writing a proposal is a full-time job" (Informant 3, Executive Director).

International trends related to refugee flows were also cited as a funding and eligibility challenge, as funds are often taken from one area and applied to another to meet unanticipated needs. The outcome above sees some groups prioritized over others. An informant voiced that, "in Canada, we don't have a proper system. When a trend comes we just put all the money there and then … it's become very political. We don't have a fair [system] … to welcome refugees. (Informant 2, Intake and Client Engagement Lead)

Another informant spoke about expanding Syrian refugee-specific programming to be more inclusive of all Arabic speakers after having seen gaps in service availability for refugees from other Arabic-speaking communities. A participated stated that, "other communities are interested but their CLB [Canadian Language Benchmarks] is more than three and they weren't Syrian for example. So now-a-days we are trying to do it for all the Arabic speaking clients" (Informant 6, Settlement Worker).

Acts of resistance

Informants acknowledged that, at times, they operate outside of the structured institutional design. Some informants discussed how acts of resistance to the established system and expected practices are necessary because of the settlement institution's flaws.

The informants also expressed that the settlement institution favors certain groups of newcomers and overlooks others. The settlement institution is inconsistent across organizations in terms of service delivery priorities and expectations.

> You have these trends, world trends, that you will treat different refugees in different ways, with privileges, and some refugees coming from the same situation or maybe a worse situation but you treat them bad or maybe not treating at all … You don't have a proper system to like you know provide them … If we don't give the support, then where they can find the support? (Informant 2, Intake and Client Engagement Lead)

At times, the informants attributed their acts of resistance to the settlement institution to their sense of what it means to support refugees' settlement. At other times resistance was grounded in an organization's stated mission and commitments to refugee settlement not being fully implemented, due to internal and external constraints. Acts of resistance from informants in this study were closely correlated with funding constraints and service users' ineligibility for services.

> We are service providers to newcomers. It doesn't matter what they need. … You have to provide this service regardless of the eligibility criteria of this service. We can't say "hey this is the need, no, no you are refugee claimant, go, go, we don't provide this as a service." … We are here to support … the main vision to support the newcomer. (Informant 4, SWIS)

Similarly, another informant spoke about funding constrains and expressed that their organization serves people irrespective of their status.

> There are differences between [organization] policies and the government funding. For the funder, the funding that we get is only for us to serve permanent residents and convention refugees. For example, refugees, non-status for example, or Canadian Citizens, we would not be funded … we have what we call open policy, whoever comes into me, whoever comes into us we need to serve them. Be they for example they could be citizens, refugees, people with non-status. (Informant 8, Information and Referral Specialist)

An informant spoke about meeting timeframes and the constraint it can place on adequately meeting needs. This informant reflected that meetings have a standard time frame of 30 minutes per person – but sometimes takes more time, especially with a family. When a refugee does not fit the service eligibility criteria, the settlement institution continues to uphold a pathway to accessing services that might not be physically, mentally, or fiscally feasible for the service user. The aforesaid potentially results in tension and conflict between the refugee and the practitioner. An informant reported that "if there is an extenuating circumstance like mental health issue or a special needs child, we will pretty much always take the case even if we have to juggle things around" (Informant 9, Lawyer).

Informants expressed that affordable housing is a significant issue for refugees in Toronto. Despite the development of new partnerships to address housing challenges, housing continues to be inaccessible to most refugee families. Practitioners find themselves calling shelters and the centralized housing access point to find space for refugees. In some cases, it is even necessary for practitioners to look outside the city for shelters, which creates a further set of needs (e.g. organizing and paying for transportation).

An informant shared an experience trying to find housing for a family. The practitioner described feeling a high sense of responsibility for the family's wellbeing. Consequently, personal money was pooled by a group of practitioners in their organization to ensure the family had a safe place to stay until another shelter or space opened.

> [Referring to housing] Once we had a family and then all the places are closed and full, and then we are not supposed to do this, but then because the family told us that they didn't have money, every one of us

> in the office we had to chip in then we provide some money to them to stay for one or two days. When you have a family with two or three kids, I don't think you would be able to let them leave without any place to stay for a night or two nights. (Informant 8, Information and Referral Specialist)

Finally, acts of resistance to the settlement institution also occurred when practitioners deemed their respective organizations' policies guiding service provision to be misguided or unhelpful to service users. For example, informants discussed how their organizations actively discourage accompanying service users to referrals or personal appointments because the service user completing these tasks on their own is seen as empowerment. However, one informant disagreed with this logic and spoke to the value of teaching through demonstration. This informant gave an example of a refugee who felt overwhelmed at navigating directions independently and discussed how walking them to one of their appointments helped to reduce their stress. The informant pointed to the effectiveness of this practice because, at a later time, they observed the service user teaching newcomers the directions and accompanying them to their appointments.

> I ask, "how can I help you?" like immediately so she said, "can you help me, like you know, apply for welfare?" … welfare office is just there, but she said, "I don't know how to walk there" so I said, "let's walk there and then you can go." Now what she did, actually she helped with four people who came as refugee claimants walk to the [welfare office] – now she knows how to make it. Like she commented "I help her, I help him." … You probably feel at the beginning it's just a waste of time but actually it is an investment. You see how they are helping each other too. (Informant 2, Intake and Client Engagement Lead)

Discussion

Using CMS and IE, this article offers a discussion regarding the ruling relations that regulate the settlement process for refugees in Toronto, using the practitioners' standpoint position. Acts of resistance to the settlement institution, whether big or small, see the practitioners operating outside of the prescribed service delivery model, institutional expectations, and governance structures. Resistance can be embedded in how service users access services despite not meeting the service criteria. It can also be individualized, such as when workers pooled their money to provide shelter to a refugee family. The invisibilized work (Hosken, 2018; Smith, 2005) has been conceptualized as resistance and is commendable, but it is important not to glamorize this narrative. The responsibility of aiding service users should not be placed on practitioners; rather, the settlement institution should meet the basic needs of service users.

Informants pointed to funding as an obstacle, and, specifically in the context of refugee trends, a significant factor governing service eligibility ("ruling relations" Smith, 1999, p. 49). Funding also creates disparities in service provision across organizations. Practitioners attempt to uphold their missions and mandates, and offer services regardless of eligibility requirements, by forgoing funding or applying to other funding streams. However, as mentioned by a participant, the process by which organizations apply for funding is labor and cost-intensive, often leaving smaller community organizations uncompetitive compared to more substantial organizations (Francis & Yan, 2016; Mukhtar et al., 2016; Tilson, 2010). More research is needed to understand how organizations solicit and diversify their funding and the implications of both competing for and maintaining funding from various sources.

Funding controls which service users are prioritized, the appropriate amount of time a service user receives a service and determines which programs are the most efficient for integrating service users and supporting their settlement journey. The funder acts as a "translocal force" (DeVault, 2006; Deveau, 2009) and fundamentally shapes practitioners' professional practices. In turn, the aforesaid shapes how refugees navigate settlement, determining whether they can access services and for how long. Informants spoke about the prioritization of certain service users due to international trends. While resettlement is politized (Oudshoorn et al., 2020), the funding and

eligibility criteria should remain socially inclusive and flexible so that practitioners can meet all refugees' basic needs.

The MCI has responded to gaps by federal funding by funding services to all newcomers through the NSP. MCI specified in a call for proposals that "NSP has broad client eligibility criteria and complements federally-funded settlement services which are not available to newcomers who are Canadian citizens, refugee claimants, international students or temporary foreign workers" (MCI, 2017). However, NSP funding may be tied to the specific staff at different settlement service organizations and may be insufficient, resulting in busy schedules and waitlists. Consequently, some newcomers are still being excluded, resulting in practitioners engaging in work outside of the system.

Consistent with IE and CMS, the meetings between service users and practitioners are clouded by the funder's agenda and requirements. The funder's agenda shapes practitioners' professional practices, such as can be seen with funding models and, in turn, eligibility criteria. IE would consider funding and eligibility as the basis for the regulations or relations of ruling that are extra locally organized, but locally implemented. In this way, the priorities of the funder are carried out by the practitioners. It is essential to ask if a shift in the funders' agenda could allow inclusivity in terms of eligibility criteria for settlement services. A shift, for example, could let individuals who wait several years for their refugee claim to be processed but are not eligible for services that they may need to settle, integrate, and contribute to society.

The funders' agenda and funding requirements are attributed to neoliberalism, which infiltrated the nonprofit sector in the early 21st century, and which has resulted in the significant and ongoing restructuring of settlement services since the 1970s (Evans et al., 2005; McGrath et al., 2010). Organizations that used to benefit from core operational funding have had to transition to a more outcomes-based model of service delivery, receiving program or contract-funding strictly. Terminology such as quality assurance, target numbers, accountability, and efficiency situate organizations precariously between funders' agendas and their own mandated goals (Doerfel et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2005; McGrath et al., 2010; Mukhtar et al., 2016; Shields et al., 2016). Adler et al. (2007) contend that, "in the instrumentalist approach to management and organization … or, in the non-for-profit sectors, performance targets–take on a fetishized, naturalized quality. (p. 10.). However, while the "number game" correlates number of services users with more funding, this may not be the most effective approach to service delivery, especially as refugees' needs are not a one-size fits all, meaning that some families need more time and some ineligible service users need access.

Conclusion

This study contributes to a broader exploration of factors that support or hinder refugees' settlement and integration process. Using CMS and IE, this study sought to improve an understanding of the ruling relations that regulate the settlement process for refugees in Toronto. The findings indicate that settlement organizations need to respond to the funders' demands and expectations, which has created an unstable, constantly fluctuating environment for service provision. Against this backdrop, significant emphasis is placed on practitioners' capacity to identify and respond to refugees and newcomers' diverse needs and establish connections internal and external to the settlement sector. Practitioners are working within funding constraints that have led to acts of resistance. Both practitioners and organizations choose between their internal mission and mandate, a personal sense of what it means to offer support, and funders' agendas.

Notes

1. A "refugee claimant" is seeking protection in Canada. This means that the individual has made a claim, but the decision has not been determined (CCR, n.d.).

2. A "standpoint position" refers to the material practices and relations anchored in reality, noting that it does not relate to inner psychological experiences, thoughts or feelings of an individual (Klostermann, 2020; Smith, 1990a, 1990b, 2002, 2005, 2006).
3. IE understands that "institutions are not viewed as singular forms of organizations, but rather as functional complexes such as education, health care, [settlement] and law, in which several forms of organizations are interwoven" (Graham, 1998, p.352).

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