

MEDIA RELEASE

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Refugees in Tasmania resilient in adversity

With World Refugee Day this Friday 20 June, new research at the University of Tasmania has found that people who have resettled in Tasmania from war-torn Sudan, Sierra Leone and Liberia have remarkable levels of resilience.

School of Psychology PhD student Alicia Copping is investigating the experience of life crises from the perspective of these former refugees, looking at people's struggle to make a new life after the traumatic events they have experienced associated with war, poverty, and life in refugee camps.

"I hope this research will lead to the development of culturally competent trauma support services in Tasmania," Ms Copping said.

"I'm particularly interested in the strengths people draw on when faced with adversity, and the ways people feel they have grown after such experiences. This is a concept known as post-traumatic growth."

Interestingly, Ms Copping has found that former refugees are not only challenged by the life crises they have experienced in their home countries and refugee camps, but also face barriers to resettlement in Tasmania such as limited work opportunities, discrimination and cultural bereavement, all of which can be equally distressing.

"They talk about the fact that Australian society doesn't always share their cultural values; for them, adapting to that situation can be a life crisis," she said.

"For example, many feel they are having parental control taken away from them."

Despite the horrors many former refugees have experienced, Ms Copping has found that they are remarkably resilient.

"People commonly cite religious faith, determination and hope for the future as being among the most important factors in their survival.

"Education, employment and encouraging future generations to make a positive contribution to the Tasmanian community are among their highest priorities."

Ms Copping will present her results at conferences in Boston, USA, in August and at the Australian Psychological Society's annual conference to be held in Hobart in September.

World Refugee Day celebrates the contribution of former refugees to host nations around the world.

- Ms Copping is interested in interviewing more people who have resettled in Tasmania from Sudan, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

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