

## **GWNZ Fellowship Progress Report**

I would like to start by thanking Graduate Women New Zealand (GWNZ) for their unwavering support and commitment to uplifting women in their respective research fields. The Graduate Women New Zealand Fellowship has provided me with invaluable support for my doctoral research. I would not have reached the milestones I have now without it. In particular, because I became very unwell for a few months last year, and I had to resign from my work. Without the support of the GWNZ fellowship I would not have been able to carry on with my research work and be nearing the end of my research project.

I am currently enrolled in the Victoria University of Wellington doctoral program majoring in Psychology. My research work aims to better understand the mental health needs of migrant and refugee youth through taking a holistic view on their wellbeing and centering their voices in conversation about mental health.

Since receiving this scholarship, I completed the analysis for my first research study based on Youth2000 data, which provided insights on the importance of social support for migrant and refugee wellbeing and sense of belonging. Specifically, we found that increased social support was associated with better wellbeing outcomes and lower rates of self-harm and suicidal thoughts and ideation for migrant youth. We also found that social support was a mediating factor between a sense of belonging and feeling settled in Aotearoa, and mental health and wellbeing. Meaning, that young people from 1<sup>st</sup> generation migrant backgrounds and refugee backgrounds were more likely to feel like they belong in Aotearoa and experience less mental distress and a greater sense of wellbeing when they felt supported by their family, friends and other adults in their lives. It is noteworthy that refugee youth self-reported the least amount of social support of all the groups we assessed. I am currently analyzing the data for my second study, which has involved interviewing 16 young people aged 16-24 about mental wellbeing.

The purpose of this second study was to prioritise young migrant voices and develop an understanding of what they themselves identify as being important to their mental wellbeing. This was necessary as most survey measures are designed for Western populations, and do not consider the specific experiences and context of these youth, both in relation to their mental health and wellbeing and in the specific context of Aotearoa. Participants were asked questions such as “what does mental wellbeing mean to you?”, “what challenges your mental wellbeing?”, and “what fosters mental wellbeing for you?” to gain insight into what they deem important. Once analysis of this study is complete, I hope to begin drafting an ethics application to undertake follow up interviews for the development of a resource to be used by either the young people themselves, or for service providers and organizations working with these youth.

In addition to my doctoral work this year, I have continued my professional development by attending conferences both nationally and internationally. I have been recruited by the University of Auckland as a research fellow to develop a survey on refugee mental health and wellbeing. I have also continued my consulting work with *Nas*, a collective of scholars and practitioners redesigning systems and forging pathways for more Just and equitable futures.



Going forward, I hope to submit my dissertation by the end of this year and continue my studies in the Clinical Psychology program at the Victoria University of Wellington next year. I am honored to be a part of this community of inspiring women and will be forever grateful for the opportunities that this scholarship has granted me.

A photograph of my partner and I attending the Healing Our Spirits Worldwide Conference 2023 in Vancouver (where he was presenting on his research project).

Niusha Aryan