The Happiness of Refugees in the United States: Evidence from Utica, NY

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Abstract

We study determinants of happiness, a subjective measure of wellbeing, for roughly 600 refugees from over 30 different countries currently residing in Utica, New York. For refugees from the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, and Southeast Asia, having many friends from one's own ethnic group is strongly positively correlated with happiness in Utica, while for African refugees, English language skills are a strong determinant of happiness with living in their local area. Income is only modestly related to the happiness of refugees in general, though the results vary by group. We do find strong evidence that those with children are happier than those without. These last two results represent departures from much of the broader literature on happiness in the United States.

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Introduction

A vast literature in social sciences studies the migration patterns and settlement of immigrants to various parts of the world. Since the Indochinese Immigration and Refugee Act of 1980, over 3.3 million refugees have been resettled in the United States, a number that far exceeds that of any other country (U.S. Department of State).[1] In addition, refugee admissions to the United States have become increasingly diverse, with resettled refugees from 78 countries in 2016 alone, more than twice the number in 1981 (Fix et al. 2017). Despite the size and diversity of the population, outcomes for refugees to the U.S. have received relatively little attention. By definition, refugees are individuals who have left their home countries because of war, violence, or persecution and who fear returning for risk of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, or belonging to a particular social group (U.S. Department of State). This forced migration, by which individuals have little choice over where they resettle, differentiates the refugee experience from that of other immigrants. Given the differences in the purpose for migrating, the level of preparedness for the move to the United States, and the process by which migration occurs, results from studies of immigrant integration may not hold for the population of refugees. In particular, the determinants of economic and subjective wellbeing may not be the same for refugees and other immigrants who have moved voluntarily.

Most studies of immigrant integration, and even the few that analyze refugees, focus on economic outcomes such as employment, wage or income gains, educational attainment, housing adequacy, or receipt of public assistance (Lichtenstein et al. 2016 ; Evans and Fitzgerald 2017). Exceptions include papers by Lichtenstein et al. (2016) and Newbold and McKeary (2018), which emphasize noneconomic outcomes such as health, friendship formation, language

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[1] According to the Migration Policy Institute, in 2016 alone, the United States admitted nearly 85,000 refugees which represented approximately two-thirds of refugees resettled worldwide.

acquisition, and feelings of safety or stability. Ott (2011) addresses the topic of secondary migration among refugees, but relies on a case study approach because of the lack of data on refugees after they are initially settled in the United States.

This study addresses refugee integration from an alternative angle by focusing on refugee happiness. How happy are refugees in the U.S. and what factors affect their level of happiness? While there is a developing literature on happiness and subjective wellbeing, we are not aware of other empirical studies directly addressing the happiness of refugees. Using a new survey of refugees who have migrated from a range of countries to Utica, New York, we estimate models that predict levels of refugee happiness with respect to two contexts: their lives in the city of Utica, and their lives overall in the United States. We find that one of the strongest predictors of the happiness of refugees is the composition of their friend groups. Those with a significant portion of friends in the same ethnic group are much happier with their lives both locally and in the United States in general than others. Similarly, those with weak English skills are less happy in Utica and in the United States. We also observe clear ethnic origin effects with refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Southeast Asia, and Africa being happier than refugees from the former Soviet Union. Finally, having children contributes positively to refugee happiness, but income is only modestly related to happiness, results that run counter to findings in the non-refugee happiness literature.

Refugee Integration

Empirical studies on refugee outcomes in the U.S. tend to fall into two categories, those looking at national patterns and trends and those focusing on particular ethnic populations or geographic resettlement areas. The national studies must work within the constraints of the

scarce data available from administrative databases such as the Department of State's Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) or large scale surveys. Capps et al. (2015) use data reported to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) by voluntary organizations on the front line of resettlement to detail a variety of labor market, educational attainment, and public assistance participation outcomes. They present descriptive statistics showing that male refugees are more likely to be working than their U.S. born counterparts, while female refugees are equally likely to be employed as female non-refugees. They also find that in general, refugees experience improving economic situations as their time living in the United States increases. Specifically, incomes of refugees increase and the likelihood of public benefit participation decreases over the course of their lives in the United States. Nonetheless, the average incomes of refugees remain below that of otherwise similar non-refugees.

Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) support the Capps et al. finding that age of entry plays a key role in the economic and educational success of U.S. refugees. Using the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (ACS), the authors find that as refugees' time in the U.S. increases, their income levels and rates of public benefit participation approach those of the U.S. born. They find higher rates of schooling beyond high school and college attainment for refugees entering the U.S. before age 18, relative to those entering during adult years. Remarkably, college completion, labor force participation, likelihood of employment, and labor earnings for refugees that enter during their childhood years are all nearly on par with native born individuals. While educational attainment, language skills, and earnings of those entering the U.S. after age 18 lags far behind the native population, the percent of these refugees in the labor force and employed matches or exceeds that of U.S. born adults.

While national studies such as the ones described above benefit from large sample sizes, the outcomes that can be evaluated are limited by data availability and the lack of questions pertaining to the unique situations faced by refugees. The RISE project in Denver, Colorado conducted an ambitious data collection effort to better understand refugee integration during the first four years after resettlement (Lichtenstein et al. 2016). Specifically, the survey design is based on the work of Ager and Strang (2004, 2008), who develop a broad and holistic framework with which to evaluate refugee (or immigrant) integration. Similar to the previously cited studies, the Ager and Strang model includes measures of employment, housing, and education, but they also include measures of social connection, language acquisition, safety, and community engagement, allowing them to create a comprehensive index of integration and wellbeing. Using a cohort of refugees that arrived in the U.S. in 2011, Lichtenstein's results show increasing measures of integration over time for the overall group of refugees, though with marked differences according to country of origin and age of arrival. The authors' results show that finding work and being economically self-sufficient, spending time with people from other cultures, and learning the English language all lead to greater measures of integration.

Some studies suggest that the city or location where refugees are initially placed can affect outcomes – a "lottery effect" where differences in labor markets, housing costs, and social welfare benefits impact refugee integration success and the likelihood of remigration within the United States (Brick et al. 2010; Bruno 2011). However, Fix et al. (2017) indicate that this lottery effect based on state placement is less pronounced than initially thought, as metrics such as employment, rates of underemployment, and incomes did not vary widely within refugee groups across states. The authors argue that these findings may point to the importance of refugees' resilience, the wide network of non-governmental organizations that participate in their

resettlement, and the refugee program's "work-first" policy. Our paper contributes to the literature by focusing on refugees who have been resettled to a single city. By holding constant factors such as the availability of refugee services, the strength of the job market, and local culture, we can identify refugee specific factors that affect how happy they feel in their new location.

Based on the premise that the goal of refugee resettlement is to improve the quality of life for those who come to the U.S., we build on and contribute to the existing literature by directly asking refugees how happy they feel about their lives in their new location. Given the harsh pathway by which refugees enter the migration process, objective measures of economic success such as employment, income, or adequate housing may fail to result in high levels of life satisfaction. Similarly, it is possible that those with low economic means, who would be classified as having a weak level of integration as measured by one or more components of the Ager and Strang index, may actually live quite happily in the United States. Studies such as Safi (2010), Hendriks and Bartram (2018), and Bartram (2011) advocate using subjective measures of wellbeing such as happiness to study individual migration outcomes. However, while immigrants are a self-selected group that chooses to move in order to better their wellbeing, refugees are forced migrants who may or may not have been satisfied with their lives prior to the circumstances that caused them to move. Therefore, while previous authors focus on the change in happiness, which they hypothesize should be positive for those who voluntarily migrate, we focus on the present level of self-reported happiness post-resettlement for our sample of refugees.

The literature using subjective measures such as happiness to study the broader concepts of individual wellbeing is rapidly developing, particularly in the economics literature that has

long focused on objective outcomes such as income or wage levels (see, for example, Kahneman and Krueger 2006; Veenhoven 2007; and Diener 2009). In the context of refugee integration, happiness provides a broader construct that avoids the assumption that component outcomes are additive into an index. Instead, self-reported measures of happiness allow respondents to net out the factors such as income or measures of social bonding that increase or decrease their own self-assessed wellbeing into a single measure. Using such measures limits the ability of others to determine what constitutes positive refugee outcomes and gives agency to the individual respondent. While there are several studies that focus on the happiness of immigrants who choose to move from their native countries (Graham and Markowitz 2015; Senik 2014; Angelini et al. 2015), there is ample reason to believe that determinants of refugee happiness will differ. By definition, refugees do not relocate to maximize any sort of return on human capital or to fulfill a plan for which they spend years in preparation.

Refugee Data from Utica, New York

The lack of high quality data on refugees has been well documented. Ott (2011) and MacDonald (2015) discuss at length the dearth of survey data on refugees, not only in the United States, but also around the world. The low density of refugees in the United States means that simple random samples are likely to contain few refugees or, conversely, would require significant funding to obtain sample sizes adequate for empirical analysis. Large surveys such as the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey, or the U.S. Census ask questions about the country of birth, but fail to identify refugee status. Researchers using these data to study refugees rely on statistical approaches that exploit the country, year of entry, and other demographic data to impute refugee status or the probability of refugees status to

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individual immigrants in the sample (Evans and Fitzgerald 2017; Giri 2016). While such approaches lead to valuable analyses of certain outcomes, none of the large surveys mentioned ask questions about happiness or wellbeing.

Other researchers, primarily those concerned with questions of physical and mental health, have relied on explicitly nonrandom data collection approaches. Techniques such as snowballing, cluster sampling, and respondent driven sampling exploit the social networks of known refugees in an effort to collect an adequate sample size (Bloch 1999; Sulaiman-Hill and Thompson 2011). Such approaches may provide efficient mechanisms for accumulating responses, but they can lead to biased samples not suitable for statistical analysis.

The data for our analysis is taken from the Survey of Utica Refugee Retention and Financial Inclusion (SURRFI), a 2017 survey of refugees currently living in the city of Utica, New York. Utica is a city in central New York State that has experienced a significant population decline over the last several decades, primarily due to the decreased economic opportunities and jobs in the city. In 1960, the population was over 100,000, but by the late 1990's it had decreased to approximately 60,000 people, and has since stayed roughly stable around that number. Over the last few decades, a large influx of refugees has prevented the city from even further population decreases, with over 16,000 refugees arriving in Utica since 1979. The large inflow of refugees can be largely attributed to the efforts of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRCR), a voluntary agency established under the auspices of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). The MVRCR opened its doors in 1981, helping settle refugees from all over the world by providing resettlement services funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

The SURRFI was conducted in the summer of 2017 via face to face interviews across most residential neighborhoods in the city.[2] From May 28, 2017 to August 15, 2017, research teams traveled door to door to identify and interview households with refugee members. Because pilot tests showed language barriers to be significant, the survey was made available in six languages: English, Russian, Bosnian, Burmese, Karen, and Arabic. Of the 21,351 business and residential addresses in the City of Utica identified in administrative records, the research team visited 7,216 residential addresses. Of these, someone answered the door at 4,198 addresses. Of those who answered, the team identified 1,041 households with at least one refugee member, and collected complete surveys from 523, for a response rate of 50 percent.[3] While the overall response rate was high, refugees from the former Soviet Union were initially underrepresented. Cooperative efforts with the MVRCR resulted in an additional 100 of these respondents, for a total sample size of 623 surveys. Overall, the sample size for the SURRFI data is one of the largest known refugee samples for a single city.[4]

The survey asked basic demographic information such as age, gender, country of origin, highest level of education attained, as well as a number of attitudinal questions about their lives in the United States, and more specifically, about their situations living in the city of Utica. In particular, the survey asked people to respond to the following two statements: "I am happy with my life in Utica", and "I am happy with my life in the United States." The survey provided five

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[2] To contain cost, the team did not survey several higher income and lower population density sections of the city. Initial attempts to identify refugees in such neighborhoods proved unsuccessful.
[3] Survey respondents ages 15- 18 required parental consent, so households in which the parent was not available but which were answered by minor children counted as refugee households. No records were kept on the number of such households, but the research teams reported a large number of such households. Excluding these households would obviously raise the response rate.
[4] The RISE survey from Denver Colorado surveyed 467 refugees in 2011-12 and followed them for four years (Lichtenstein, 2016).

possible responses, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".[5] We note that because all refugees surveyed are from a single city, such factors as the unemployment rate, labor and housing market characteristics, and even the degree of native resident acceptance of the refugee community are implicitly held constant throughout our regression analysis.

Along with its strengths and the unique opportunity this data affords to study a large refugee population, the survey instrument and resulting data do have limitations given our particular purposes. Income is available as a categorical variable with cutoffs at roughly the 25th and 50th percentiles for the US household income distribution ($30,000 and $60,000 per year, respectively) at the time of the survey. As such, we cannot replicate the nonlinear income patterns present in many happiness studies. Also, the survey neglects to ask about respondents' marital status, a variable present in most studies of happiness. We do know that among the respondents over the age 20, 74 percent had children. Similarly of those over age 25, 83 percent had children. Finally, while the data contains information about educational attainment, we cannot be sure where such education was received. About 50% of the refugees in our sample came when they were less than 20 years of age, so we may infer that the vast majority of those that have at least a four year college degree received it after migrating to the US. Even with these shortcomings, we believe the data provide a valuable opportunity to evaluate refugee integration into a small U.S. city.

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[5] This question asks specifically about one's current situation, rather than a comparison between the past and the present. It would be unclear what the appropriate reference point should be for someone forced to move from their country should we attempt to study a change in refugee happiness given the refugees in our sample come from vastly different pre-migration experiences.

Table 1a shows some summary statistics for variables used in this study. The average age of respondents is slightly above 34 years[6], 57 percent are female, and roughly 70 percent have completed at least a high school degree. While more than half of the sample is currently employed, most households have modest incomes, with 56 percent below $30,000 annually, 32 percent between $30,000 and $60,000, and only 12 percent over $60,000 per year. The mean responses for the agreement with the statements "I am happy with my life in Utica", and "I am happy with my life in the United States" are 4.11 and 4.40, falling somewhere between "agree" and "strongly agree". Similar to the general population of Americans, the refugees in this sample broadly report being happy with their lives, though a smaller fraction are happy about living in Utica than they are about their lives more generally in the United States. To test the degree to which these variables measure the same concept, we note that the correlation between the two measures is roughly 0.5. This moderate level of correlation suggests that these respondents consider happiness in Utica and the US to be separate, though somewhat related concepts. As for the countries of origin of the refugees in the sample, the largest group of people are from Southeast Asia (primarily the ethnic Karen people from Myanmar/Burma), which makes 42 percent of the entire sample. Individuals from the former Yugoslavia (nearly all Bosnians) and the former Soviet Union (largely Belarussians, Ukrainians, and Russians) comprise 22 and 20 percent of the sample, respectively. Refugees from various African nations make up 12 percent of the sample, while those from the Middle East or for whom their origin is unknown make up the remaining 4 percent.

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[6] There were 94 observations where information on age was only provided in certain intervals. For these observations we used the interval midpoints to impute ages. Excluding these imputed observations did not substantively alter the results of the analysis.

Table 1b shows a more detailed look into two of the important variables used in the study, the level of agreement with the statements "I am happy with my life in Utica" and "I am happy with my life in the United States." We see that for the entire sample, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents either strongly agree or agree with each of these statements. Nearly 36% strongly agree that they are happy with their lives in Utica, with another 45% agreeing with this statement. Overall, refugees are even happier with their overall life in the United States, with 53% strongly agreeing that they are happy in the U.S. and another 38% agreeing with this statement. While all refugees are generally quite happy both with their lives locally as well as more generally in this country, there is some variation across the different groups. Africans have the highest average happiness with living in Utica, with a mean of 4.22 and 47% indicating the highest rating for this question, which is more than double the percentage (22%) of those from the former Soviet Union that gave the highest rating for this question. Meanwhile, for the statement about being happy with life in the United States, over 68% of Bosnians gave the highest rating for this question, while the analogous figure for Southeast Asians is only 47%.

The Happiness of Refugees in Utica

To analyze the determinants of the happiness of refugees, we estimate standard wellbeing regressions for the entire sample, including common variables such as gender, whether an individual has children or not, the highest level of educational attainment, employment status, and income. We also include variables that pertain specifically to refugees: the age at which a refugee entered the United States, the number of years since entering the U.S., the degree to

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which their friends are from the same ethnic group, an indicator for those that frequently attend religious services (at least once a week), and indicator variables for country/continent of origin.[7]

Table 2 shows the results for Ordinary Least Squares regressions, where the dependent variable is equal to the degree to which respondents agree with the statement that they are happy with their lives in Utica (on a scale of 1-5, with higher values indicating stronger agreement). We report robust standard errors that account for potential heteroscedasticity. In column 1, we find that gender, employment status, and religiosity are not significantly related to being happy in their local area. A number of recent empirical studies show a strong connection between income and wellbeing, both within the United States and in other countries, particularly at lower levels of income (Deaton 2008; Kahneman and Deaton 2010; Stevenson and Wolfers 2008), but we find only a modest relationship. The coefficient on medium income (between $30,000 and $60,000 annually) is negative relative to being in the lowest income group, while the coefficient on high income (greater than $60,000 annually) is positive and only marginally significant with a p-value of 0.09. We also find that having children positively impacts one's happiness with their lives in the local area, a result which is at odds with some of the broader literature on subjective wellbeing, though this may be due to the omission of information on marital status, which we unfortunately do not have in the survey and is generally positively related to both happiness and life satisfaction. A number of studies find that having children decreases wellbeing along many dimensions (Glenn and McLanahan 1982; McLanahan and Adams 1989; Evenson and Simon 2005; Blanchflower 2009), though other research finds that these results vary by gender, age of

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[7] Age is a typical variable in wellbeing regressions, but we are unable to include this because age of entry into the United States and the number of years that one has lived in the U.S. are collinear with age. Another typical specification in the literature includes a quadratic term in age in addition to the linear term. We also have run these regressions using age, age squared, and years in the United States and the results are similar, though age and age squared are not statistically significant. We chose this particular specification because much of the literature on refugees has a particular focus on the effects of age of entry and years in the United States on various outcomes.

first child, and total number of children in the household (Kohler et al. 2005; Herbst and Ifcher 2012). Interestingly, those with at least a four year college degree are significantly less happy with living in Utica relative to all others. Typical happiness regressions show that more educated individuals tend to be more satisfied and happier with their lives than those with less education, but it is possible that more educated people do not find the local area to be suitable to them.[8]

We find several interesting results for variables that are specific to an immigrant or refugee population. The coefficient on years since entering the United States is negative and significant, suggesting that more recent arrivals are happier about living in this area than earlier arrivals, and those that say that their friends are primarily composed of those in their own ethnic group are much happier about life in Utica. Hendriks et al. (2018) find evidence of migrants' deteriorating perceptions of their living conditions as their length of stay increases. They argue that many immigrants experience declining political trust and deteriorating satisfaction with the host society or their position within society.[9] Unsurprisingly, those flagged by interviewers as having weak English speaking skills are significantly less happy about their lives in their new city. In the second column of Table 2, we add four controls for country/continent of origin (indicator variables for those from Africa, former Yugoslavia, Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and countries in Africa). Other groups were too small to study and were not included in column 2. We see that refugees from Africa, South East Asia (the ethnic Karen people), and the

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[8] For a basis of comparison, we conducted a similar regression using the 2010 United States Behavioral Risk Surveillance System (BRFSS), a large nationally representative data set of over 300,000 observations that contains a question on general life satisfaction. While the outcome measure is not identical to the ones used in our analysis, we used a specifications very close to the ones used in the current paper. The coefficients on having children, being employed, being female, having at least a four year college degree, being in a middle income group (between $35,000 and $75,000 for the BRFSS), and being in a high income group (over $75,000 for the BRFSS) are all positive and statistically significant.
[9] We note that the number of years in the United States is strongly positively correlated with having family members moving away (r= 0.26) and slightly negatively correlated (r= -0.11) with the sentiment that "my community cares about refugees."

former republics of Yugoslavia (mostly Bosnians) view their lives in Utica, on average, more positively than refugees from the former Soviet Union (the omitted indicator variable in the regression), holding other variables constant, while the coefficient for refugees from the Middle East is not statistically significant. The coeffficient on years in the United States is no longer significant once control for ethnic group, which may partly be explained by the fact that earliest wave of refugees came from the former Soviet Union (the group that reports the lowest level of happiness with living in Utica).

The previous regression results focus on refugees' happiness in their particular city of resettlement within the United States. Next, we analyze the determinants of happiness more generally within the United States, a related but separate concept. Table 3 presents estimation results using as a dependent variable the degree to which respondents agree that they are happy with their lives in the United States, thereby changing the reference point from a local to a national level.[10] In column 1 where we include the entire sample, we now see a somewhat stronger relationship between income and happiness with living in the United States than we did with happiness living in Utica. Those with incomes greater than $60,000 per year rate their happiness with living in the United States 0.22 points higher on a five point scale than those with incomes lower than $30,000, while those with incomes between $30,000 and $60,000 rate their happiness 0.13 points than those in the lowest income group, though this coefficient is only significant at the 10% level. Similar to the regressions in Table 2, those with a significant portion of friends from the same ethnic background are happier with their lives in the United States, while those with weak English skills are less happy. We also find that frequent attendance at

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[10] Although these refugees may only have firsthand knowledge about what life is like in their current home of Utica, there are other sources of information about living elsewhere in the United States such as news outlets, social media, or relatives who have moved away and live elsewhere in the United States. From our data, we know that a little over a quarter of respondents have had a sibling or child move away from Utica.

religious services is negatively correlated with how refugees feel about their lives in America. After controlling for ethnic origin in column 2, we find that both income variables remain positive but lose their statistical significance. The positive and significant coefficient for Bosnians shows that they are significantly happier than refugees from the former Soviet Union, and t-tests for the equality of coefficients shows that they are also happier than Southeast Asians and Africans, though not significantly happier than those from Middle Eastern backgrounds.

Next, we look at each of the four major refugee groups separately and conduct individual regressions to see if the results on the main covariates differ by group. In Table 4, we present results for one's happiness with living in Utica. Similar to the regressions for the entire sample, we do not find significant gender differences in happiness with living in Utica for any of the refugee groups. The coefficient on having a child is positive for all groups except those from the Soviet Union, where there is a negative but insignificant coefficient. The coefficient on "4 years of college or more" is negative for three of the four groups (Africans, former Soviet Union, and former Yugoslavia, but not Southeast Asians) but is not precisely estimated for any particular group. The negative coefficient we saw in Table 2 on years since entering the United States seems to be largely driven by the group of Southeast Asian refugees, as this is the only group with a statistically significant coefficient in the separate regressions. With respect to income, Bosnians in the highest income category are significantly happier with their lives in Utica than Bosnians that have incomes in the lowest category. The general result that those with friends in the same ethnic group tend to be happier holds true for Bosnians, Asians, and those from the former Soviet Union, but not for Africans. Interestingly, the result that those with weak English language skills are less happy with living in Utica only holds for Africans, but not for any of the other groups in the separate regressions. The coefficient is very large in magnitude (a drop of

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0.72 points on a 5 point scale) and statistically significant at the 5% level. African refugees as a group tend to be smaller in number and more diverse ethnically, including Somalis, Sudanese, Liberians, and Tanzanians, among others. Not knowing English is more isolating for refugee groups with smaller support networks. An ability to communicate with others using English appears much more important for those without a significant group of fellow refugees from the same language and ethnic group.

Taken together, our results suggest that the large numbers of Russians (plus Ukrainians and Belarussians), Bosnians, and Karen people allow for social bonds to be formed within each of those specific communities. In contrast, Utica's refugees from Africa are composed of many more different ethnic groups and each group is small in numbers. This may make it difficult to form a community within any specific group, as social ties much be formed across groups. This is consistent with literature on social identity of Africans, which shows that "blackness" may define one's social identity and belonging more than one's specific ethnic group (Phinney and Onwughalu 1996). In Mary Waters' book *Black Identities* (1999), she studied West Indian immigrants to the United States and writes that for many of the individuals, "identity was socially constructed and situational: it mattered who they were with, what the circumstances were, and who was doing the asking and defining of identities and labels." In the context of African refugees, there are few enough in each particular ethnic group such that they may bond together in the identity of all being black and from the Africa continent. This notion of "panethnic" identity is observed among Africans studying at universities with few conationals (Hume 2008). [11] Work by Breitborde (1998) also suggests that the decision to use English among Africans is a specific social act that communicates a particular personal identity. Breitborde's

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[11] Similar findings for Latinos are discussed in Padilla (1984) and Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral (2000).

research relates to our results that weak English skills for Africans lowers one's happiness in their local area. Africans with strong English skills will be better able to develop a community among other Africans from different ethnic groups, which can explain why English skills are more important to happiness locally than having friends within the same specific ethnic group.

Finally, our last set of results involve group specific regressions when the dependent variable is the happiness with life in the United States. These results are shown in Table 5. Having children is positively related to happiness for Asians and negatively related to happiness for refugees from the former Soviet Union. Africans with at least a college degree are unhappier with life in the United States than other Africans in our sample, while educational attainment is not significant for any of the other groups. For those from the former Soviet Union, having more friends in the same ethnic group is positively related to happiness in the U.S., while for Bosnians, higher incomes and *not* frequently attending religious services are both positively related to happiness with life in this country. The coefficients for weak English skills are negative for all groups, but never statistically significant. For Africans, their happiness in the United States is not as strongly affected by their English skills as is their happiness living in Utica. It is possible that for this group of refugees, those with weak English skills are still generally happy to be in the U.S. but frustrated that they are in a location with relatively few from the same ethnic and language background.

One potential concern is that ordinary least squares (OLS) is not appropriate in the context of categorical dependent variables such as the ones used in our analysis. In additional analysis not reported here, we have also estimated all of these regressions using ordered probit and ordered logit models, and the results are very similar to the ones obtained using OLS. We also estimated binary probit and binary logit models using a "1" for the "strongly agree"

category and "0" for all other categories, as well as a "1" for "strongly agree" and "agree" versus "0" for all other answers. Once again, the overall results are very similar to the ones reported in Tables 2-5. Finally, we also explored the use of normalized dependent variables by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation to provide a common metric across groups and across measures. Upon re-estimating our main specifications using normalized metrics for Utica happiness and USA happiness, we find that the results are similar. Results for any of these ancillary regressions may be obtained upon request of the authors.

Conclusion

This paper estimates the determinants of happiness of refugees using a new survey of refugees to Utica, New York. Income has a positive, but modest relationship to happiness, and those with children are significantly happier with their lives in Utica and living in the United States. For all refugee groups except Africans, a consistently strong predictor of happiness is having many close friends of the same ethnic group. For Africans, having good English skills is strongly related to happiness in Utica. These two results taken together are interesting, as they reflect two ways that allow new arrivals to feel integrated into their new country. Having a community of people with a similar background increases wellbeing for those that have a significant number of people of their same ethnic group, while being able to speak English fluently allows Africans, for whom there are many small ethnic groups represented in Utica, to integrate and get to know those outside of their specific ethnic group. We also find that the number of years since entering the United States diminishes happiness only for the group of Asian refugees, but not those in other groups. Bosnians have the strongest positive relationship between income and happiness, with other groups having insignificant coefficients.

The results from this paper have some potentially important policy implications. Under the authority of the 1980 Refugee Act, the federal government chooses where refugees to the United States will be resettled. Considering happiness to be one overall indicator of successful integration, our findings support policy for at least two clear objectives. First, refugees should, when possible, be resettled in cities with significant populations of the same or similar ethnic backgrounds because those who form friendships with other refugees from the same ethnic background are consistently happier than those who do not. Second, our results support efforts to improve opportunities to learn and improve English skills, as this is strongly related to the wellbeing of refugees, particularly for those with smaller numbers in their specific ethnic group.

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