

# Gender, Migration and Mental Health: Stress and coping strategies of first-generation female Polish migrants in The Netherlands

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Polish migrants are the largest Eastern European population residing in the Netherlands, which requires specific attention. As an increasing amount of Polish women arrive to the Netherlands annually, gender related mental health among Polish migrants is still a subject not readily explored in a Dutch context.

**Theoretical Framework:** Women are found to have different mental health experiences than men, and Eastern European female migrants to Western Europe were found to have higher instances of depression and anxiety than native populations. Lazarus's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is used to formulate a framework for the research design.

**Research Design:** This qualitative study explores the migratory stressors that Polish migrants face and their assessment of the stress, and their personal coping mechanisms of their stress. 12 in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain experiences of stress and coping strategies related to migration to the Netherlands. Photo elicitation was used as an additional data collection method.

**Results:** Main deductive codes families that were developed are 'stress', 'primary appraisal of stressor', 'secondary appraisal of stress', 'coping strategies', and 'adapting'. Principle 'stress' was caused by feelings of isolation, relationship related stress and finding a job. Primary and secondary appraisal of stressors and stress included how the participants analyzed their situation and available resources. Coping strategies were unique to the individual participant, and ranged from engaging in activities to self-help techniques. Adapting ranged from negatively and positively adapting to their stress.

**Conclusions and Discussions:** General conclusions were that although individual participants respond uniquely to their stress and have various coping strategies. Participants have experienced at least one or more of the following initial universal migratory stressors: stress with finding a job and housing, and stress due to lack of social support. Familial and relationship stress also is a significant part of female Polish migrants lives in the Netherlands. Coping strategies were unique to the participant, but accessing social supports deemed most universal.

**Key Words:** Gender, migration, and mental health; Polish migrants; The Netherlands; migration; stress; coping

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## Chapter 1-Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Human migration is a global phenomenon that occurs in every part of the world. Migratory patterns of humans can be attributed to social, economic, and environmental ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors like political differences, economic opportunities and environmental tragedies.

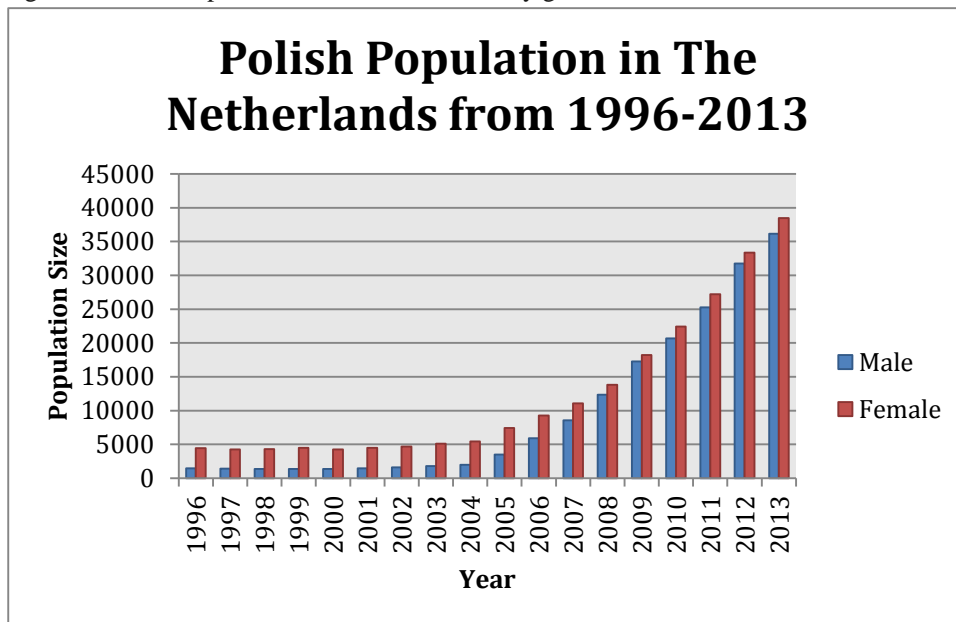
Cross-border migration is a phenomenon that European countries are faced with. Since the dawn of the European Union, free trade of goods and travel across member states became more accessible and entering a new culture as a migrant became easier. With higher economic prospects, citizens non-EU member states at the time, like Poland and other Eastern European countries, had to obtain a visa or working permits to be able to earn money abroad in Western Europe. Since the inclusion of the A8 states (states added to the European Union on May 1, 2004) many Eastern European countries experienced, for the first time, a more liberal regulations of migration, being able to cross into Western Europe with only their passport no visa (Favell, 2008).

Even though the European Union is considered a single political entity, there are many economic disparities among member states when it comes to economic opportunity. Poland, the most populace A8 member state, experiences lower economic status than a Western European country like The Netherlands. Poland has some of the highest migration rates out of any other Eastern European EU country (Statistics Netherlands 2006, cited by Polek, 2008). Job wages are lower in Poland, resulting in continuous mass cross border migration for economic migrants from Poland to The Netherlands. Economic migrants are defined as migrants looking for low to medium skilled jobs to earn higher wages than in their home country (Torunczyk-Ruiz, 2008). The Netherlands, in 2013, had a recorded that there were in total 74,629 Polish citizens residing within the borders (StatLine, 2014). On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, there are a registered 107,885 first generation migrants from Poland residing in the Netherlands, and the numbers are rising each year (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Conscious of the vast, historical in-migratory pattern of Polish migrants to The Netherlands, awareness of lifestyle differences of these new residents is necessary. Migration, especially migration related to labor, carries a certain amount of stress that contributes to psychological problem. The Dutch government, by law, claims to have relatively fair laws on migration, rights of migrant works, and human rights/labor laws. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights reiterates that the Dutch government is required to “*protect, respect, and fulfill the human rights of Polish migrants*” (The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights, 2013). These policies and laws, along with higher wages and a free labor market, contribute in making the Netherlands an attractive locale for migrants looking to improve their quality of life by aspects like financial gain. Laws are in place to be followed and to protect the wellbeing of migrants that are citizens of the European Union, or migrants that have legal standing to be living and working in the country. The Netherlands possesses these previously stated ‘pull-factors’ that paint an attractive picture for prospective migrants, whether they are legal European migrants or asylum seekers.

Migration, historically, has been considered a male phenomenon, and until recently trends in global female migration have surged (Martin, 2003). According to data from Statistic Netherlands (2014), there is consistent evidence of a larger population of Polish women than men present in the Netherlands, approximately 3000 more from years 1996-2006. After the free labor market integration in 2007, the population altogether vastly increases, but women are still always ahead in population size (CBS, 2014a). Reasons for this discrepancy is unknown, perhaps due to different migration trends between men and women. This could also be due to migrants, temporary or not, choosing to register with a municipal population registry. Many seasonal migrant workers are not required to register their stay in the Netherlands at a population registry (CBS, 2014a) Regardless, this contrast cannot be ignored, as women are the recorded dominant sex in migration patterns.

Figure 1. Polish Population in the Netherlands, by gender, from 1996-2013



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014.

Women migrate and work just as men, but when it comes to mental health, women and men have been found to react to migratory issues differently (Wong & Leung 2008, Kerkenaar et al. 2013). The World Health Organization states that on a global scale, depression is found to be present two fold more in women than in men, and patients stricken with mental health troubles often times do not seek the necessary medical help when faced with psychological strife (WHO, 2015). In terms of migrants vs non-migrants in context, females who migrate face more instances of depression than the females in the natural born population (Sieberer et al. 2011).

First generation migrants are considered a part of society that is highly prone to different physical and mental health needs than the natural born population in a given context (Zaleska et al, 2014). Depression and anxiety are disorders with high morbidity trends among the European population, and migrants to Europe are anticipated to have higher instances due to their migration and/or



assimilation process (Kercknaar et al. 2013). Health care systems have also been found to provide inadequate mental health care services to migrants in need (Kercknaar et al. 2013).

Effects of living in a different location, working in a new environment, and learning a new language, are issues that migrants cope with on a daily basis and contribute directly to the mental health of an individual.

With research already conducted in different European countries on coping mechanisms on Polish migrants as a whole, this research will focus on how Polish women cope with psychological and mental health stressors they face when migrating, settling down, and continuing life in the Netherlands.

## **1.2 Objective**

The objective of this research is to explore how first generation female Polish migrants in the Netherlands individually cope with the psychological stressors that come with migrating and living in a different country with a different culture, and how this effects to their lives while living in the Netherlands.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1) What are the psychological/mental health stressors that first generation female migrants from Poland face when living and/or working in the Netherlands?

- What aspects of migration on everyday life cause stress or mental health issues to Polish women living in the Netherlands?
- What are the mental health help seeking behaviors of female Polish migrants in the Netherlands?

2) What coping strategies do first generation female Polish migrants adopt when faced with psychological stressors due to their life living as an immigrant in the Netherlands?

- How does the individual female Polish migrant cope with stressors that affect or interfere with mental health?

The population of focus will be the northern region of the Netherlands, in Groningen, where Polish migrant populations are not as vast as in the Randstad, the most densely populated region in the Netherlands that consists of a cluster of the four largest cities in the country. The majority of Polish migrants take up residency in that location due of the large amount of labor work available. The presence of a large Polish community is a positive aspect for mental health, and

focusing on a location where an ethnic community is not as strong could uncover a wide range of different coping strategies with migratory stressors.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Paper**

This paper is structured in a chronological way, with the preceding section as Chapter 1, the introduction. Chapter 2 will consist of the literature review, theoretical framework and conceptual model. Chapter 3 explains the research design and data collection process. The following section will be Chapter 4, the results of the research, continued by the last and final section, Chapter 5, with the discussion and conclusions.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

The migration process as a whole is a life-changing event. Pre migration, the act of ‘migrating’, and post-migration are all experiences and series of events that are intense and potentially burdensome (Shar & Vilens, 2010); Bhugra, 2004). Considering the main focus of this research is Polish migrant women living in the Netherlands, stressors from different stages in life (perhaps relating to the migration experience) and behavioral coping strategies will be crucial in understanding how the individual copes with stress.

### **2.1 Literature Review**

#### **2.1.1 Migration and mental health**

Concerns about mental health with the migration process are parallel issues. Migration creates stressors that can result in profound effects on mental health, regardless of social stature or reasons for migration (Sher, 2010; Bhugra, 2004). These effects manifest themselves in disorders like depression and anxiety (Hiott et al. 2008), schizophrenia (Bhagra, 2004), and even suicide (van Bergen & Saharso, 2010). The migration process is of long duration, and effects of the act of migrating can carry over to the post-migration state. Arguments from different cultures state that the initial stage of migration is most difficult (Wong & Leung, 2008) while others argue that the post stage of migration causes the most stress (Sher, 2010). Subjectivity should be taken into account with these observations, but it can be concluded that all stages of migration carry stressors and burden to the individual, depending on the context. Referring to the argument by Sher (2010), remarks that aspects of post migration can cause the most amount of stressors to an individual. Adjusting to a new environment and acculturation can make a migrant feel lost and out of place, therefore resulting in mental instability, regardless of being diagnosed with a mental disorder before the migration process (2010).

Migrants choose to migrate for a variety of reasons, and despite the fact that all migrants face stressors, some migrants like refugees and asylum seekers have a higher risk of developing a mental disorder due to migration than economic migrants (Bhugra 2004, 247). Lacking documents and a supportive community, migrants face the risk of being exploited by bureaucratic and employment measures, but also psychological decline (Hiott et al. 2008). Bureaucratic barriers (Stanciole & Huber, 2009), in addition to lingual and cultural barriers hinder the individual migrant from accessing the proper mental health assistance they need. These obstacles along with housing, work stress, home-sickness, isolation (Mirdal, 1984) and familial issues (Weishaar, 2008) are magnified compared to the non-migrant in the host country. Suicidal act rates are higher for migrant groups of specific ethnicities in their new location than compared to rates in their country of origin (Sher, 2010).

Stress due to acculturation is relative in a migrant context. Acculturation stress, a coined by Berry (2006) refers to the stress related to the acculturation process; the process when a migrant evolves to adapt to their host societies (Berry, 2006). Stress as a result of acculturation can result in a migrant questioning their social identity and struggling with becoming accustomed to the host

culture, to more serious consequences like mental health and psychological issues. (Berry, 2006). Even though voluntary migration is intended to improve well-being, the WHO (2001) states that migration can lead to risk of developing mental illness, due to extreme life changing factors and events, and lack of social support, and also acculturation related stress (WHO, pg. 13).

### **2.1.2 Gender, migration, and mental health**

Focusing on female Polish migrants to the Netherlands, gender becomes a topic of discussion. Migration affects every individual who experiences it, but women are considered to be the most effected and most vulnerable (Sher, 2010; Kawar, 2003; Mirdal, 1984). In the past, many women left their home country to migrate to be with their husbands, resulting in dependency, loneliness, and isolation (Mirdal, 1984).

Even in a western society like the Netherlands, women experience different mental issues than men, and can still be marginalized in the home, in the workplace, or in society. Regardless of socioeconomic status, women are more at risk for psychological strife because of societal expectations (WHO, 2001). Women are twice as likely than men to develop depression than men (WHO, 2015), and are more likely to attempt a suicidal act than men (van Bergen & Saharso, 2010). In some situations, women's gender roles in the family are different than men, and therefore they can take on a double burden of responsibility and stress. Family and spousal issues, work stress and social pressures all contribute to a migrant woman's psychological health (Afifi, 2007; Wong & Leung, 2008). In relation to migration, women without social support, who experience stressful or life changing events are more psychologically vulnerable than men experiencing the same situations (Afifi, 2007). In Austria, among Eastern European migrants, the gender differences in morbidity with depression and anxiety are more prevalent among women than men (Kerkenaar et al. 2013).

Another difference contributing to gender mental health differences is that women tend to worry twice as much as men, and the majority of mental health cases of anxiety and panic disorders is reported by women (Afifi, 2007, 337-338). Self-worth and perception from the host society as well as in their country of origin creates social pressures which lead to anxiety and other mental health issues (Afifi, 2007; Wong & Leung, 2008) Bhugra (2004) states that pressure to succeed in the host country from family members back home causes additional stress to already underlying migration stress. Emotional stressors have been found to negatively affect women more often than men (Wong & Leung, 2008).

As women and men have different conclusions when it comes to mental health outcomes due to migration, it is not only women that experience psychological strife. As it was found that depression is more prevalent in females (WHO, 2015), men are more likely to react to stress with substance abuse (Afifi, 2007). Men find their stressors to be more parallel to workplace related stress and pressure to succeed (Wong & Leung, 2008). Compared to the native born populations in Europe, male migrants had the same equal instances of depressive symptoms (Sieberer et al. 2011).

This segues into the topic of remittances, or earned money abroad sent to family members back home. Since economic migration is the main push factor for Polish migrants to the Netherlands because of higher wages, remittances are just another pressure that female Polish migrants face during the migration process. Not only is there pressure to succeed in the host country, but to support oneself and another. Martin (2003) states that globally women, who generally earn less, send back more of their salary to their family than men. The double burden of responsibility, along with psychological health differences, can follow migrant woman wherever they choose to migrate.

### **2.1.3 Polish migration to Western European countries, and mental health**

CBS (2014) states that more than 100,000 Polish migrants in the Netherlands, 70% of which come to work as labor migrants, 20% come to marry or join relatives. Very small amount of Polish students come to study in the Netherlands. According to CBS, most of these migrants are not permanent. As of 2014, approximately 50% of Polish migrants living in the Netherlands have left the country after 10 years staying (2014)

Bhugra (2004) Individuals that migrate because of economic reasons, like most Poles in the Netherlands, have less of a risk of being exposed to mental duress than refugees or asylum seekers. That being said, all migrants face stressors that can result in negative outcomes when related to mental health (Sher, 2010). Bureaucratic issues can still pose as a stressor contributing to mental health issues, like stress and worrying, even if there is less of an obstacle than in previous history.

Former Soviet Bloc countries, due to their lower economic status, report overall lower health rates than Western Europe. Polish migrants in Sweden reported to have lower 'self-reported' mental health than natural born Swedes (Blomstedt et al. 2007. 8). Research relating to this has not been explored in a Dutch context, but in Germany, it was found by Wittig et al. (2008) that Polish migrants experience more mental health problems than the native German population. Polish families that migrated experienced more relationship issues than other migrant populations, which impacted mental health. Polish migrants also relied on their social supports when experiencing a mental health issue (2008).

### **2.1.4 Polish Migration to The Netherlands and other Western European Countries**

Migration of Polish citizens to Western Europe has been active even before the economic integration of the European Union in 2004. Poles were leaving Poland for non-communist countries like Sweden since the 1970's (Blomstedt et al. 2007) and to other locations in Western Europe. Now that Poles have political access to these countries, migration trends are strong (CBS, 2014a). Historically, Polish migrants, as individuals, have either two reasons for migrating, and they have been for either political reasons or economic reasons. Before integration, economic migrants were seen as low educated and poor, and political migrants were seen as the opposite (Torunczyk-Ruiz, 2010). Dutch migration laws are more relaxed than other European countries, which attracts many global migrants for prospective improvement in financial opportunities and quality of life. The surge of Polish migration to the Netherlands began

in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, this can be accredited to certain factors like the convenient geographical relationship between the countries (Torunczyk-Ruiz, 2010). Today, many Polish migrants, about 70% in the Netherlands work in the labor market (CBS, 2014). The Netherlands has consistently been a destination location for migrants throughout history. In neighboring Germany, most Polish migrants work in industries like manufacturing, construction and agriculture (Jelinkova & Drapalova, 2014).

Since economic integration, Poles have benefitted from their European Union status, especially in countries, like the United Kingdom, where they have been migrating to for decades. Political stress decreased greatly among Polish migrants in England when economic integration occurred. No longer did Poles have to live in fear of being arrested or deported, and some had a new sense of belonging (Spencer et al, 2007). This improves stress levels greatly compared to illegal residents, refugees and asylum seekers, but still Poles, because they are still migrants, face issues like access to health care (large amounts of paper work and processing for benefits, language and cultural barriers, poor living conditions and even the risk of being exploited in the workplace (Spencer et al. 2007, Stanciole & Huber 2009). In some cases (in Scotland), despite experiencing difficult situations that came with being a migrant, chose to look past that and remind themselves that life and opportunities are better in their host country than in Poland (Weishaar, 2008).

### **2.1.5 Documented coping strategies of migrants**

Regardless of many studies addressing stress among migrants, they are all geographically diverse ranging from China to Scotland to the United States. These authors state that previous to their research, studies are seldom conducted about stress and coping among migrants in those respective countries. Empirical findings declare that the migrant transition and lifestyle is a more difficult existence than compared to a non-migrant (Hiott et. al 2008; Weishaar, 2008; Wong & Leung, 2008).

Social and community support is the underlying matter that contributes positively to mental health, and lack thereof can result in devastating consequences (Hiott et al. 2008; Weishaar, 2008; Weishaar, 2010; Torunczyk-Ruiz, 2008). Social support is crucial in positive mental health and aiding distress. Migrants that are not part of a family (migrate alone) or do not have a surrounding community are more likely to suffer from psychological problems (Bhugra, 2004, 245). The presence of adequate social support in a migrant context is influential to decreasing stressful consequences in tragic or aggravating situations, due to migration (Zaleska et al. 2014). As ethnic communities in a host country provide information to the migrant about the area of migration, advice, and warnings (Spencer et al. 2007), they also provide a support network in times of need. Women without social support, who experience stressful or life changing events are more psychologically vulnerable than men experiencing the same situations (Afifi, 2007).

Hiott et al. (2008) elaborates on the importance of a social support network among Latin American male farm worker in The United States. Besides harsh working conditions and long hours that a migrant is faced with, the authors mention that social incidences of marginalization and family life have profound effects on mental health. The results of this quantitative study of 125 men reported that among that sample, overall psychological health was quite low, with

‘social isolation’ of the individual migrant having the highest statistical significance apart from any other independent variable (others included work conditions, family, and legality and logistics) for scores contributing to anxiety and poor working conditions had the highest effect with depression (2008).

Among Polish migrants in the United Kingdom, the most imperative part of coping with migratory issues is leisurely distraction (Spencer et al. 2007; Weishaar, 2010). Enjoying time with their family or partner, making friends, learning the host language (Spencer et al. 2010), and doing activities like reading and spending time outside (Weishaar, 2010) were coping mechanisms that helped migrants face their stressors. Opportunity and motivation to succeed were also pinnacle ideologies that Polish migrants had when they felt discouraged, stressed, or defeated (Weishaar, 2010).

### **2.1.6 Conclusion of Literature**

From the literature collected, it can be concluded that mental health of migrants, especially females, is a theme not readily explored, and for many reasons. Considering that it is not an issue clearly visible at a glance, mental health of migrants can be overlooked when compared to other migratory issues, like legality or labor. Stress from visible affairs directly impact mental health of an individual, and how that individual faces that stress. Stressors will not disappear instantly, and may reduce with policy intervention, but how to cope with these stressors is a point theme that has not been explored among female Polish migrants in the Netherlands. The theory and literature collected in these sections will guide and influence the research.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is the theoretical framework that will be used throughout this research process. The model, created by Lazarus in 1966, explains how ‘stressors’ that result from intense or life changing events, and the decision making process of how the individual perceives the stress, and lastly the individual coping mechanisms. These ‘stressors’, described by Lazarus and Cohen (1977, cited by Glanz & Schwartz 2008), are outside phenomena or internal issues that have a direct effect on the ‘equilibrium’ of an individuals’ mental health. Stressors have the ability to interfere with everyday life of the person experiencing the stressor, and can have either a positive or negative effect on the mental and/or physical state. Stress, is an outcome of the stressor and can lead to different outcomes. On one hand it can lead to psychological and physical illness, and on the other it can have a positive effect (211). How an individual categorizes these stressors is the basis of this theory, and from there, the stress caused by the stressor will proceed to affect the individual (Glanz & Schwartz 2008, 211).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping begins with the individual evaluating their stress at face value. This is mentioned as ‘primary appraisal’ stage, and is how the person perceives the external stressor of which he or she is faced. The phase of ‘secondary appraisal’ consists of how the individual will categorize that stressor, and how they can emotionally adapt with the stressor, either positively or negatively (Glanz & Schwartz, 2008). Primary appraisal is related to how the individual processes the stressor internally, and secondary appraisal consists of the environment and available resources that assist in coping strategies (Weishaar, 2010).

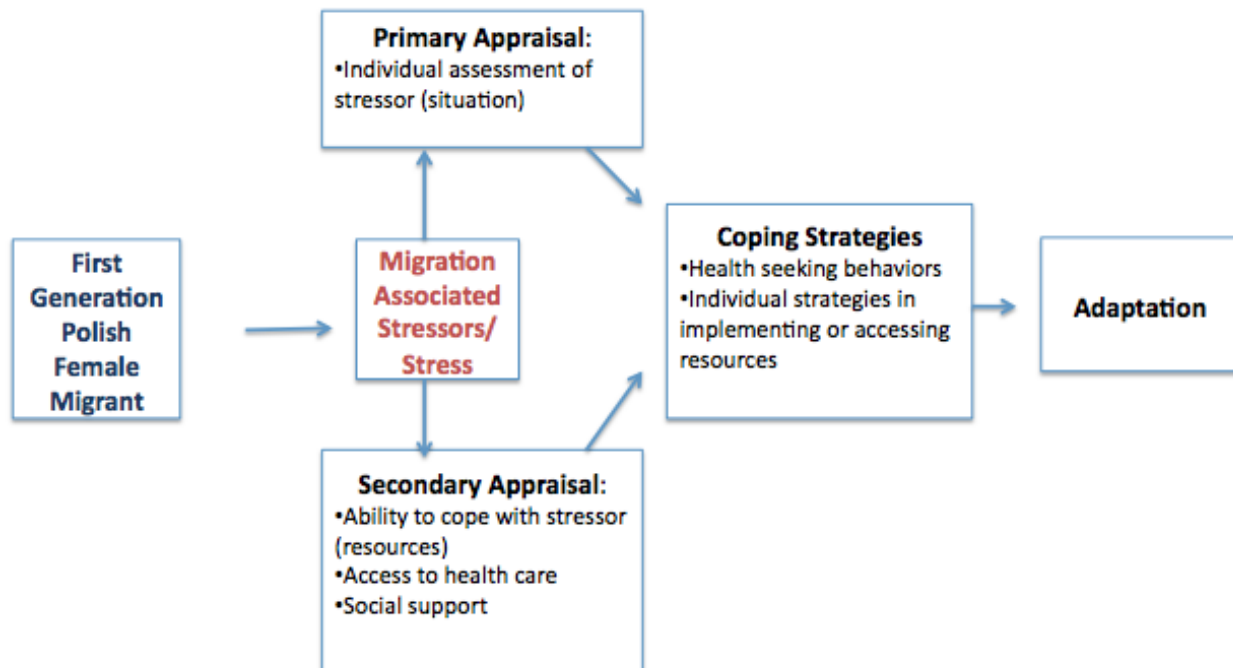
Individuals manage the ability to perceive, process, and cope with the same stressor in different ways. Glanz & Schwartz (2008) elaborates that individuals assess and process stress differently. For instance, a life-changing event could negatively impact a person, while not having an effect on the next. Considering that the act of migration has corresponding stressors that the migrant experiences (Sher, 2010), the individual migrant will appraise and cope with these stressors according to their own behavior. The entire migration process (including pre-migration, the act of migration, and post migration) can result in causing stressors in the migrant. Migrants have limited access and resources in obtaining mental health assistance, and often adults will not acknowledge their mental strife (Sher, 2010; WHO 2015).

### 2.3 Conceptual Model

In a qualitative study conducted by Weishaar (2010), the transactional model of stress and coping is also used to observe stressors of Polish migrants, both male and female, in Scotland. The study focuses on the stressors that migrants face while living and working in Scotland, the appraisal of the stressors and how the migrant emotionally processes these perceived stressors, and their personal problem solving techniques when faced with the stressor.

The conceptual model for this research is adapted from the original conceptual model from Lazarus' transactional model of stress and coping (Glanz & Schwartz, 2008) and Weishaars' (2010) adaption of that model. Gender, migration, and migration stressors specific to the group of focus are added to the model to for the research subject.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model



Adaptation from Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus (Glanz et al, 2008) and conceptual model by Weishaar (2010).



The conceptual model above explains the process of the subject, the first generation female Polish migrant in this case, experiencing the stressor and then the coping strategies implemented. The model, flowing left to right, documents the chronological order of how the stressor originates and then flows to the inevitable adaptation of the stress resulting from the stressor. Elaborations of the concepts are in bullet points underneath of the concept. These elaborations are derived from the related literature collected. Definitions and operationalizations of these concepts can be observed in the following section.

## 2.4 Operationalization of Concepts

Concepts from the conceptual model are operationalized in this section. Operationalization of these concepts signifies how they are measured in this particular study. Definitions of these concepts can be found in Chapter 10, Stress, coping and health behavior, of Glanz et al. 2008, titled *Health Behavior and Health Education*. Page numbers are in parentheses.

Figure 3. Operationalization of Concepts

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Official Definition</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>
Stress/Stressor	Internal or External phenomena that interfere with internal equilibrium (211).	Phenomena that occurs relating to migration that interferes with life and results in stress and potentially mental health issues
Primary Appraisal	How the person judges the stressor at hand. It does not always relate to negative outcomes. It is how the person perceives the stressor and their reaction to it (215).	Reacting and evaluating how the stressor affects the participants' lives and how they feel. In addition, if the stressor results in stress
Secondary Appraisal	Realization of the person's accessible resources to deal with/address/improve the stress from the stressor (216-217).	The resources that the participant is aware of to assist in overcoming stress from the stressor
Coping Strategies	Actions and mechanisms that result from the reactions of primary and secondary appraisals of stressors and stress (217-218).	Personal mechanisms that the participant implements to either overcome the stress or to improve happiness and assist in self-help
Adapting	Stated as "coping outcome" in text. Outcome of results from implementing coping strategies (219).	How the participant finally overcomes the stress, and/or finally is able to live life to their standard of satisfaction.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

This section will discuss the methodology for the data collection process and analysis. The research design tools and reasons for implementation will be explained in the first section. The process of participant recruitment and data collection process will be discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.3, respectively. A table of the profile of the participants is included in section 3.4, followed by the data management and analysis in section 3.5. Ethical considerations will be included in section 3.6, and data quality and limitations in section 3.7. Lastly, in section 3.8, the reflexivity and positionality of the researcher will be discussed.

### **3.1 Research Design Tool**

Primary data will be used to explore the main objections and research questions. There has been no data formerly collected specifically relating to female Polish migration to Groningen and The Netherlands and mental health. Primary data collection will utilize the methods of qualitative in-depth interviews and photo elicitation to illustrate quotes by specific participants. In order to successfully reach the main research objectives of this study, two research design tools were implemented. In depth interviews and photo elicitation are two qualitative data collection methods that appropriately fit with the research design and process.

#### **3.1.1 In-depth interviews**

In-depth interviewing techniques were the primary data collection method that was chosen to carry out the research. In-depth interviews were chosen for this process, not only because of the intricate and thorough results it can provide, but also the method was technically suitable for the study design. In-depth interviews allow for a conversation to emerge about the topics at hand, but also provides for an opportunity to probe with questions that would be inductive of the context of the specific participant. Given that no two stories are alike, in-depth interviews allow for the researcher to hear each individual experience and apply grounded theory (Babbie, 2013), where data can be compared and theories can be derived from the experiences. In-depth interviews were chosen over other methods like focus group discussions, because of the desired outcome, but also because of time constraints. In-depth interviews allow for each participant, no matter how shy or reserved, to share as much of their story as they please, without any pressure. Seeing that there are some sensitive topics involved with migration and mental health, making the participant comfortable and not feeling pressured or judged by others was the desired effect.

Another reason for applying in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method was because of time constraints of the participants. Participants had different time schedules, seeing that many worked full time jobs and had children, so finding a common time to hold a focus group discussion was an obstacle.

#### **3.1.2 Photo Elicitation**

Photo elicitation, or photo voice, was the second qualitative data collection method applied to this research. Photo elicitation, stated by Wang & Burris (1997) is a method that, in this research,

participants take photographs of something the researcher has asked them to represent, resulting in a visual representation of their 'voice'. The participant is able to tell their story in their own way, on their own time, using photographs. It is another means of illustration what the participant wants to say, or elaborate on. In this case, participants were asked to take a photograph of something in their lives that helps them cope with stress, or something that makes them happy. As much as a participant can say something in an interview setting, allowing the participant more time to take a photograph of something not only allows them to creatively express themselves and their statement, but it can allow for an experience to be added to the data.

As it was not the primary means of collecting the data for this study, photo elicitation was introduced after the interviews have ended. Less than half of the participants interviewed were willing to participate in this section of the study, therefore it was not able to be as strong and dependent as the in-depth interviews. The photographs and their analyses can be seen in the results section of Chapter 4.

### **3.2 Participant Recruitment**

The data collection process started with gaining access into the Polish community in Groningen. The two techniques of recruiting participants were communicating with a community gatekeeper, flyers, and snowball recruitment strategy. The Polish mass on Sunday evenings was the starting point. Establishing contact with the priest as the gatekeeper was the first step, where flyers were displayed and a word about the research was said at the end of mass. Flyers were distributed after mass to possible participants, as well as a short introduction about the research. The same flyers were distributed at a Polish store where Polish goods are sold in Groningen. After gaining access to the community and a few interviews were conducted, the snowball recruitment strategy was implemented. The snowball recruitment strategy consisted of asking the participant if there are any other women that they know that fit the criteria of the targeted participant for the research. Most women gave the names of one other woman that would be interested in participating.

Figure 4. Flyer for recruiting participants

**JESTEŚ POLKĄ?**

**MIESZKASZ OBECNIE W HOLANDII?**

**KONIECZNIE ZAPOZNAJ SIĘ Z ULOTKĄ, KTÓRĄ WŁAŚNIE WZIĘŁAŚ DO RĘKI.**

*Migracja dla każdego jest bardzo trudnym etapem w życiu, który objawia się ogromnym stresem i przysparza wiele trudności. Stres spowodowany migracją Polaków i różnice płci, nie były do tej pory tematem badania w Holandii.*

Nazywam się Marta i jestem studentką Uniwersytetu Rug w Groningen. Pisząc pracę magisterską, chciałabym podeprzeć ją informacjami, uzyskanymi od osób, które obecnie doświadczyły migracji. Pomagając mi, przyczyniasz się do pogłębienia wiedzy badań akademickich i społeczeństwa o trudnościach jakim muszą sprostać kobiety na obczyźnie.

Jeżeli odpowiesz **TAK** na poniższe pytanie, proszę nie spoglądaj dłużej obojętnie na tę ulotkę i nie wyrzucaj jej od razu do kosza.

- **Mieszkaś w Groningen?**
- **Jesteś kobietą?**
- **Masz ukończone 18 lat?**
- **Masz ochotę podzielić się własnym doświadczeniem?**
- **Jesteś w stanie poświęcić 30 minutek na rozmowę w miłym towarzystwie?**

Chciałabym mi pomóc, ale moja ulotka nie odpowiada na wszystkie Twoje pytania? Nie wahaj, pytaj! Myślę, że to właśnie na Ciebie mogę liczyć!

- **[m.gintowt@student.rug.nl](mailto:m.gintowt@student.rug.nl)**

### 3.3 In depth interview and photo elicitation process

During the recruitment process, 12 women were interviewed. The interview process took place from mid-May to mid-June. Interviews consisted of sit-down interviews that took place in a neutral location to the participant and the researcher. The atmosphere was comfortable and open, and most participants were liberal with sharing their migration experience and other personal stories. The average time frame for most interviews ranged from 30 minutes to over one hour.

Interviews were recorded using a recording device, in this case the researchers cellular smart phone on a digital recorder app, and were transferred onto a computer afterwards. Transcriptions of the interviews were done congruently to the data collection process.

Introducing the photo elicitation process took place after the interview was finished. The process was explained and given an information sheet with the purpose and instructions. This information

sheet can be accessed in the appendix. The researcher requested that the photographs be sent back to her through phone within two weeks of the interview. Only five out of the twelve women were able to send photographs. Many women cited their busy schedules to being unable to participate in the photo elicitation process, which is understandable.

### 3.4 Profile of Participants

The study population is Polish women, over the age of 18, who are first generation migrants to the Netherlands. It was not a requirement to necessarily live in the city of Groningen, but ultimately participants all resided in the city limits

The anonymized profiles of the twelve participants are below, stating age range, employment status, partnership status and reason for migrating.

Figure 5. Profile of Participants

Name	Age Range	Employment Status	Partnership Status	Reason for Migrating
Nadia	30-35	Employed	Boyfriend	Work
Milena	25-29	Employed	Boyfriend	Work
Kinga	30-35	Self-Employed	Single	Love
Hanna	25-29	Employed	Married w/children	Work
Bascia	40-45	Self-Employed	Married w/children	Marriage
Julia	50-55	Unemployed	Single w/ adult children	Work
Liliana	25-29	Employed	Single	Work
Ada	25-29	Employed	Boyfriend	Work
Maja	25-29	Employed	Boyfriend	Love
Helena	30-35	Employed	Married	Work
Agata	40-45	Self-Employed	Married w/children	Education
Emilia	40-45	Unemployed	Married w/children	Marriage

### 3.5 Data Management and Analysis

Ten out of the 12 interviews were conducted in English, while the remaining two were conducted in Polish. The Polish language interviews then translated and transcribed into English for analysis. The translated interviews were coded in English. The Polish language interviews were transcribed verbatim from Polish into English. Transcriptions were then converted into a PDF file and uploaded into Atlas TI software, a qualitative data analysis software. From there, coding of the data took place. Deductive codes were developed from concepts in the conceptual model, seen in chapter 2. Grounded theory through the coding process was applied to observe the patterns and relationships between the data, and to help in understanding what is happening in the data.

While reading through the transcriptions and assigning codes to the data, throughout the process 127 in total were developed. After completing the initial coding process, 5 code families were developed to reflect the themes in the conceptual model. Stress, primary appraisal of the stressor, secondary appraisal of stress, coping strategies, and adapting were the code families developed, were the existing codes were grouped together into those categories. From there the analysis of the results were conducted.

The approach to the data analysis was based on the conceptual model in chapter 2, and observing themes that appeared in the data. Many participants had similar experiences, while others had completely different accounts or approaches.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

While collecting data, participants were informed why they were asked to participate in the study, and why the study is relevant and being conducted. Women who were interviewed were over 18 years of age, therefore only participants who could consent on their own and are considered adults were interviewed. All participants were participating on volunteer status. Informed consent in the form of a handout (see appendix) was asked to be read and understood before the interview was to begin. The participants were asked to sign and date as well as ask any questions or voice any doubts about the data collection process. The participant was aware that all data would be anonymized and they could stop at any time if they felt uncomfortable or unable to finish. All participants were open and did not prematurely end any interview.

In terms of ethical considerations for the photo elicitation data collection method, participants were given an information sheet to take with them after the interview. The document (see appendix) contained information of what is looked for in a photograph and what is not allowed. Photos of people that are not able to consent, especially children, would not be accepted, as well as objects or obvious criteria that would give reveal the participants identity.

All data is anonymized, especially extremely sensitive to the participant, for instance a unique job occupation, was neutralized. Instead of presenting the specific careers of the participants, employment status is used in the presentation of the participant profiles. Certain jobs, like au pair for example, are elaborated on in the results section. Specific information that could reveal the identity of the participant, or specifically asked by the participant to not revealed, is neutralized. The security of the participant's identity is the upmost concern, because of sensitive personal information and stories that were shared during the data collection process.

### **3.7 Data Quality and Study Limitations**

The quality of this primary collected data relies on the content of the interviews. Most participants were open with their experiences. The interviewer was flexible with the interview guide and adapted the questions with the particular participant without wandering from the focal point of the research. All women were from the required study population and have been residing in the Netherlands for a range of years. Participants also came from different employment and socioeconomic status and partnership statuses.

One limitation of the research was that no data was collected from women who worked currently in 'black market jobs' or other job markets that require physical labor. During the snowball recruitment strategy, the suggestion was voiced, and either participant did not know of any women working in agriculture or other mediums, or the women that they knew did not respond. Another limitation is that the Polish community is small and most women would suggest a woman that has already participated or is of the same profession as other participants. A variety of familial and career backgrounds were the aims.

These limitations provide an interesting result from the research, because although these women come from a close community, their habits, outlooks and mentalities are very much different. We can see this in the results section.

### **3.8 Reflections and Positionality on Data Collection Process**

During the qualitative data collection process, one learns a lot not only about the research itself, but what the process actually means. Being half Polish, and a female migrant to the Netherlands (albeit, I am not permanent at this point), I understand personally the importance of studying the impact of mental health from migration. Not only have I experienced stressors of my own while living and studying in the Netherlands, but I have seen it from my peers as well. I did not have any bureaucratic issues while migrating, but stressors like missing family and feeling socially isolated at the beginning were themes that I experienced and therefore, can relate to. The Netherlands is a destination for many Polish people, and since I am passionate about mental health, and I noticed a gap in the research, I thought it was imperative to study. Since I am half Polish, and a woman, I was not so nervous about the interview process as I was about recruiting the participants. I did not grow up in Poland, but being surrounded by the Polish culture all of my life made me feel confident that I would not completely struggle with a communication barrier.

The biggest obstacle, which made me the most anxious, was recruiting the participants for the study. I did not know where to start and felt apprehensive. Besides taking a course, I have little experience in collective qualitative data, and as much as I was intimidated, I believed that the work would be fulfilling, not only for the research, but also for myself. Migration experiences of others has always been an interest of mine, because everyone has a unique motive and story, and only through qualitative research could you get thorough answers to your questions

As the process started, I started recruiting participants in a Polish church through a gatekeeper and with flyers distributed after the mass. Once the first few participants were interviewed, the process started to pick up. After the first two interviews, I felt more comfortable with the interview style, and the interviews felt less intimidating and I felt more comfortable. I was always concerned that I would lose the recordings of these precious interviews, so I was adamant to save them and email them to myself immediately. After gaining great information and experiences from a participant, I could not imagine anything worse than losing it!

The participants, to my advantage, were open to sharing their stories, and they were willing to elaborate on the interview questions. Some interviews were shorter and less casual, while others were filled with emotion and sensitive stories. Both provided vital results, but many women had experienced difficult situations that one could only imagine. In one instance a participant shared a very emotional and heartbreaking experience, and I asked if the participant wanted to stop



because I could sense that she was still hurting. She insisted on continuing, because she believed that it was important to share with others, that she is now ok. I am really inspired by these women who were strong enough to leave everything behind, fight through tough times for what they want, and share their stories with me for my research. As some experienced more difficulties than others, all had obstacles that they had to overcome in their lives. This is a valuable lesson that hearing other's stories can teach all us; that behind every face, there is a story or a struggle. And within that struggle there is strength.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The results of the data collection are derived from the 12 interviews that were conducted. In this section, the main deductive codes that were derived from the coding process are described with quotes to support the research objective and conceptual model. Deductive codes are codes that appear in data collected based on the conceptual model the literature (Hennick et al. 2011. 218) The main code families that will be described are Stress, primary appraisal (of stressor), secondary appraisal (of stressor), coping strategies, and adapting, in that order. Quotes will be used from the participants to support the codes. Photographs taken by certain participants will be used as illustrations to some quotes or expressions.

### **4.1 Stress**

Stress is a key component of the research, and the interviews were formulated to collect instances and experiences of what stressors the participants faced while migrating and living in the Netherlands, and how it results in stress. The word ‘stress’ was used as the first code family, rather than ‘stressor’ due to the fact that stressors are considered the event leading to stress. Stress is the response or experience from a stressor, an external or internal phenomenon that causes stress (Glanz & Schwartz, 2008). A stressor may or may not necessarily lead to stress itself, and without the stress component, the participant would not have to evaluate their situation. Participants were able to recall the reactions to their ‘stressors’ as stress. For instance, migration was considered a ‘stressor’ to one participant, but she recalled being ‘stressed’ about finding housing. As the women come from very different socio-economic backgrounds and their migration motives range from migrating for love to migrating for financial gain, their experience of stress is different, as well as their realization of their stressors and their individual coping strategies. In this section, the stressors and stress that is experienced by the participants is described. The structure of this section starts with migratory stressors that occurred in the beginning of settling down in the Netherlands; Loneliness and distance from family and friends, then to language barriers and experiences with the Dutch language, which is directly related to and followed by stress of finding a job. The last part of this section will deal with familial and relationship related stress, as well as migration dilemmas that occurred later.

#### **4.1.1. Loneliness**

Loneliness is a reality as a result of migration that affects the participants, and the result is profound when this loneliness is experienced among the women. Loneliness and isolation is a stressor that contributes to stress and unhappiness, and is an aspect of migration that is difficult, especially in the beginning. Feeling lonely can arise from the participants missing their family back at home or due to a lack of social connections in their new home. Nadia, who arrived 10 years ago to work as an au pair, remembers how loneliness, lack of social support and distance from family affected her in the beginning:

“The most painful was that I was also regretting that I took those photos [of family back at home]. I was thinking that every day I would not miss them that much. And of course the agency that I came with, there was only one girl in the north of Holland. All girls were in the south, really far away from

me so I couldn't get the contact. The girls that were au pairs from that company were in the south, they had meetings, there was a meeting every week on a Sunday, they did something together, they went to see stuff. I was there on my own. So that I found very difficult. . And that was the painful thing in the beginning. That I couldn't speak with anybody.” -Nadia

“At the beginning, the most stressful thing was that I didn't have that many friends. I didn't have the people to contact to go somewhere. I was visiting all of the places alone. You feel really weird and lonely when you go to a museum and you are going there alone. That was really stressful because I didn't get anyone to talk about something that we could see or we could watch a movie. Right now it is much more lighter, I can be stressed because I don't know, the train is not coming for the bus, the stress is easy, it's much more easier right now. After three years I can say that. Now everything is different. I know the country, I have friends, if I have a problem I can always call them. It's much more easier if you have someone that can help you here.”- Liliana

Those who experienced loneliness and isolation due to migration and settling down considered that the most burdensome cause of stress or sadness.

#### **4.1.2 Stressful and Difficult Beginnings**

As stated by these women, who both migrated for better job prospects, both cite their stressful beginnings while migrating to their lack of social bonds or contacts. Migration is represented by new beginnings, and most migration related stressors of theirs occur in the beginning. As having migrated within the European Union, these participants experienced minimal bureaucratic issues. Bureaucratic issues are usually a significant migratory stressor for other cross-border migrants, from migrants that need to obtain a visa to refugees and asylum seekers (Bhugra, 2004). Some participants had the exception of having a secured job before migrating, omitting the stress of searching and securing a job on location. The participant's major stressors and stress came from missing family and not having initial friends or social bonds. Leaving everything behind in their home country and coming to a place where they do not have any social connections results in emptiness, which is attributed to stress. Something that was a big part of their life back in Poland is now non-existent in their new country.

##### **4.1.2.1 Language Barriers**

Another migratory issue that caused stress for the participants was the language barrier between Dutch and either English and Polish. Many women had at least basic English knowledge before migrating to the Netherlands, with only one with basic Dutch knowledge. Participants who came to advance in their academic careers did not feel the need to speak Dutch, while women who migrated with anticipation of finding a job experienced stress with familiarizing themselves with the Dutch language.

“The situations were not good. I have to learn this language, it was number one. I know some Polish people, they have lived here for 5 years, for example and they still don't speak Dutch. Then you stay in the same position, working as a cleaning woman and the situation does not change ever. In Groningen, maybe in Amsterdam more people speak English or you can go somewhere and everyone speaks English. But in Groningen, you have to learn to speak Dutch. My English is very bad because I never used to speak English because everyone speaks Dutch. If you want to do something, you have to learn the language.” – Kinga

For participants who migrated for love or work that was not in academia, learning Dutch was essentially their first goal, not only for finding a job but to feel more or less integrated.

Communication and familiarizing with natives is easier when a migrant can speak and understand the language. Advancing in a career in Groningen, according to the anecdotes from the interviews, requires a grasp of the language, or else career options are slim.

#### **4.1.2.2 Finding a Job**

Finding a career while migrating to a different country is an initial step in settling down in a new locale. Some women interviewed already had secured jobs as housekeepers or PhD researchers when making the decision to migrate to the Netherlands. As stated above, learning the Dutch language was an obstacle to finding a job that provides financial support. Personal and financial pressure causes stress to these participants when faced with these situations. Many Polish women who are unable to speak Dutch find themselves working in 'black market jobs' as house cleaners or babysitters. 'Black market jobs' are low skill jobs that many times employ migrants and pay the employee without taxes. Working in these jobs are not only physically straining but are mentally and emotionally overbearing because of their illegal status. Participants who worked black market jobs did not thoroughly explain what their jobs entailed, but instead briefly mentioned their stress for that time in their life.

Kinga- "The cleaning? I hated it. I have a feeling inside of me like 'ohhh' I cannot explain....Its inside you, you feel very strange, uncomfortable feeling. My muscles were really very strange, they were cramping."

Interviewer-" But what about in your head and your feelings?"

Kinga – "F\*\*\* it, I just leave it. It was terrible." -Kinga

"I was working as a cleaning lady and that put me to the lowest of the people who did not have any education and I was working with people who did not have any education, and this made me feel so bad. So I was working as a cleaning lady for only a half year."- Maja

A sense of shame is associated with working jobs that are considered to be 'black market'. Participants wanted to spend as little time as possible in these positions. Working in a situation that is lower than their level of education, combined with hard and long working hours, this was a situation indicative of bringing about stress for the participants that were involved.

#### **4.1.3 Relationship and Family Related Stress**

Stress related to partnerships or relationships, or lack thereof, is also a source of stress for participants. Women who are in a relationship tend to, but not always, credit their partnership with happiness. Women who aren't in a relationship, have experienced the opposite, that lack of that contributes to stress and personal pressure. Relationships with a partner is a source of a close social bond and support. Experiences with stress differ with relationship status, and some participants even credit that having a boyfriend decreases stress. Lack of being in a relationship creates stress because of internal factors matching with loneliness and personal pressure to have a partner. Women that are married have different relationship experiences due to migration than women just with boyfriends. Marriages are a commitment in these women's eyes, and migration was either fueled by migrating for their spouses (or their spouses followed them) or their decision to move again also is considered by their relationship. In addition, migration related dynamics, like career differences, created rifts in marriages and relationships.

“In the beginning when he could not find a job, it was actually very difficult so we ah, were actually having a lot of arguments you know, and he was um yeah it was very stressful. I was feeling very guilty that we moved here, because we moved because of my job, and he was feeling a bit guilty that we could not find a job, we have a family so he should actually support the family. But I think he was having the feeling that he should not have quit his job in Poland. He never told me that but I am sure that he thought that about it several times. So our relationship in the beginning was a bit worse, we also talked about it that we both thought about divorcing even. But I think the child kept us together. For him it was very difficult because he did not speak any Dutch, his English was quite poor in the beginning, so he was learning English but he was not really open for speaking.”- Hanna

Differences in stress mainly come from differences in the participant’s family and social lives, difference for migration motive and differences in careers. Three women were married with children, one was married with no children, and the rest are either unmarried or in a relationship with a boyfriend. Participants with children were found to have different stressors than women without children, as children were seen as a priority for them, oftentimes putting their children before themselves. To these women, children are more vulnerable, than themselves, through the migration process. Priorities changed for women about migration when children are involved, as there are others to consider in their processes and decision-making. Some children have migrated with their parents, while one family is considering moving back to Poland, and thinking about the well-being and benefits of their children is hindering their decision. Agata, a participant who has spent about 20 years living and working in the Netherlands, has had many opportunities to return to Poland for her husbands’ work. As much as she would like to herself, the thought of her children’s wellbeing comes before her own wants and needs.

“I am more stressed for them, for the children. For me I think no. It may sound strange, but when you are 40, you have a little bit of life experience and at some point you get to the point of ‘who cares, I am 40, I have lived my life a little bit, so I know’. I am not going to try to please everyone because I do not fit into a scheme, no. It is more about my children that I want them to have a good life. For the rest its ok.” -Agata

#### **4.1.4 Migratory Dilemma**

Lastly, another significant finding was that many of the participants had a stressful dilemma caused by an event that led them questioning themselves if they should stay in the Netherlands. Events that triggered these dilemmas were usually relationship related, for instance a failed relationship, but some were also exclusive to missing family back home. Leaving their life here, that felt empty due to their event, and going back to their life in Poland, which also felt empty, was their dilemma. Maja and Kinga were just two examples of participants who experienced failed relationships with Dutch partners. Both women migrated to the Netherlands to continue their relationship with these men, and as the relationship ended, both women were unsure of what they should do and where they belong.

“One time, after breaking up with this boyfriend, when I came to Holland I was going every Sunday to church. When we broke up I really prayed. I was really waiting to get the answers on what I should do, like staying or going back to Poland, stay here or back. I was in the middle of the Dutch course, I was having a job, but it w not enough still.” -Maja

“Sometimes, yes sometimes. But I have nothing there as well. If I come back there I have to start again, find a job and a house and its difficult there, more difficult than here. It’s like yeah I am here I want to be there, but I also want to be here.” -Kinga

These ‘dilemmas’ of deciding if they should stay in the Netherlands or return to Poland were the most stressful events for some, even more stressful than the event that triggered having to make this decision. Having a life in two different places that neither felt complete was discouraging. In the end, participants that were interviewed decided to stay and continue their lives in the Netherlands, but arriving at that decision required a lot of thinking that sometimes took months. Stress and stressors described in this section is the first part of linking the data into the conceptual model. Stressors described above were either caused or exacerbated by migration itself or pressure of living and persevering in the country that is not of their roots. How these participants overcame these initial obstacles will be discussed in the following sections dealing with primary appraisal of stressors, secondary appraisal of stressors, and coping.

## **4.2 Primary Appraisal of Stressor**

As stated in the conceptual model in Chapter 3, primary appraisal of an individuals’ stressor or experienced stress is how the individual assesses the stressor as a threat to themselves. In the data collection process, the primary appraisal of stress or the stressor is how and when the participant realized that their stressor was affecting their lives, and how they personally responded to themselves. During the migration process, the migrant is exposed to many different issues that can affect them either positively or negatively. Migrants, especially women, are susceptible to depression caused by loneliness, and other obtrusive mental health issues (Sieberer et al. 2011). Although some women responded negatively to their stressors, some responded indifferently and had a benign reaction to their stress. Below are some quotes of participants realizing that they are exposed to migratory stressors and their reactions. First, descriptions of migrants negative reactions to stress due to migration and resulting in loneliness or isolation will be explored, then followed by an indifferent appraisal.

### **4.2.1 Negative Appraisal of Stressor**

When Liliana first arrived, she had a secured job as a housekeeper. She did not have many migratory stressors for finding a job, and leaving Poland was not a primary worry because of her excitement and adventurous personality. On the contrary, Lilianna experienced a bout of feeling down because of lack of social support in the beginning. She assessed her stress and sadness as something concrete that is affecting her life:

“That was like one or two days in the beginning when I said no let’s stop I will get sick, I cannot stay without the food, I have to join the life”, I have to discover something new because it was a new city. I always met someone during my bike trips here in Groningen.” -Liliana

Like the quote above from Liliana, being realistic and somewhat positive about their stress is something that occurred throughout the interviews. Experiencing feelings of isolation is common while either migrating or living in a different country, worrying family back home is not an

option for most participants. In an example below, assessing the severity of their stress, or their 'bad days' involves the influence of their family.

"If you are here without family, its not like you will call someone, yes you can call mom, but it is a little bit tricky, but when my mom is sitting 600 km from here, I cannot call them with all the bad things that happen. Because then I will give them all of my worries. It's just like three bad days, and then you can say, but you have to do something." -Agata

How a participant realizes their stress or response to their stressor is the first step in the coping and recovery process. As stated above, sometimes feeling down occurred for a few days before the participant realized it was a threat is enough to realize another step must be taken (secondary appraisal). Emilia, below gives her experience of assessing what she is feeling. She migrated with her children to reunite with her husband who is working in Groningen. Here is her assessing her mental health situation:

"So about one or half year ago I really felt a bit down. I was really feeling down. I did not want to eat, I did not sleep, I could not sleep I was just crying. So even someone said that I should go see a specialist because I was having a beginning of depression. I think that maybe it was change of season or something because it was for a few weeks I was like that. I was sleeping the whole days I was just bringing the children to school and I was coming back and I was sleeping, I was getting up at three and then I was going to pick up the children. I was thinking that it was the beginning of depression, because I was crying and sleeping and thinking 'oh what am I doing here?'. At the time I was feeling really bad, I think it was a half year ago. So maybe a little more." -Emilia

#### **4.2.2 Indifferent Appraisal to Stressor**

Lastly, it is possible that the stressor did not result in proceeding to the secondary appraisal step in the conceptual model. A stressor can in fact, counterintuitively, result in a positive or indifferent outcome (Glanz & Schwartz, 2008). Migration consists of new environments and new experiences. It is very possible that a migrant can react positively or not react at all to migratory stressors. Past negative experiences can also add to perspective of present day stress brought on by a stressor due to migration. Below, Helena has experienced loss, and she states that those experiences have not made her stronger, but in fact able to process stress better and more logically than she would if she didn't experience what she did in her past. As she did face stressors upon migrating, her past perspective helped her with monitoring her stress.

"I think yes because it gives you perspective. It's like you asked me about searching for a job, of course it was difficult. But it was not sooo difficult like I had before. It gives you perspective. You are not, of course, that the difficult things in your life makes you stronger, I don't think that. But I think that maybe if you don't allow yourself, for the first time, when it comes for the first time something wrong, something scary, you do not allow yourself to be like 'I am lying, please take care of me' because then it is not taken care of later." -Helena.

Primary appraisal of stress that results from a migratory stressor can segue into two processes. The first, the subject can judge the stressor as non-threatening or positive and therefore not react negatively to the stress. As each individual reacts differently to each stressor depending on their

personality, not all reactions to stressors are consistent. In accordance to the second process, where the participant negatively appraises the stressor, they will continue onto secondary appraisal process, which is elaborated in the next section.

### **4.3 Secondary Appraisal of Stress**

In this research, secondary appraisal takes the form of which outside resources the participants would either actually or hypothetically take in order to improve their mental health issues. The individual ability to cope with the stressor, access to health care services and presence of social support are main facets to this concept. In this section, Polish and Dutch cultures tend to differ when it comes to beliefs about medicines and access to healthcare. As some women will take the option of visiting a psychologist to address their mental health issues, other will seek alternative treatment or options, depending on their available resources.

#### **4.3.1 Professional Help**

There are different health seeking practices in the Netherlands versus Poland, with consideration of visiting a psychologist. In the Netherlands, one has to go through the step of getting a referral from the Huisarts before proceeding to see a specialist. There are a variety of angles of how the participants view seeking professional help, and their personal experiences differ. As visiting a psychologist is the logical instant paradigm for seeking mental health help, whether it is wanted or not. Psychologists are congruent with mental health, and some women would first seek help there. Below is a quote on how the Dutch and Polish health care systems differ, resulting in a necessary change in habits:

“Here everything depends on family doctor and this is the first step you can do. Just go to the family doctor. If he will not give you a referral to somewhere so then is no options for you to go to psychologist. Well this the first thing I would do. Maybe it was also pretty weird for me at the beginning, because if you have any problems in Poland you go directly to specialist. Maybe now it has changed, I don't know, but previously it was like this. When I had problem with psyche, then I was going to psychologist.” -Bascia

As there are apparent differences in professional mental health care seeking process with the Netherlands and Poland, participants' views ranged from indifferent to not convinced. For one participant, these steps were a hindrance for getting her the help that she needed. Battling a low point in her decision to stay in the Netherlands after her breakup, seeking mental health help seemed impossible for the way that she felt. A conflict with the professional help process was enough to deter her from getting the help she needed. Differences in health care practices were inadequate for this participant, and possibly for many others.

“It was not really helpful. It was like, she [Huisarts] told me I have to find a psychologist on my own and then I have to come back to the Huisarts, and then she will write for a me a referral. Then I come home and I was like ‘uhhh this is too much work’. It would be nice if she could give me something, like someone who she knows that she can call, but I have to do the job on myself. It was too much. I was really in bad condition and I don't know I had no energy to do it myself.” -Kinga



Many participants commented that they would ask their friends and social contacts for advice on where to go for mental health care guidance. Some voiced their mistrust of psychological care and the mental health care system. As in Poland, participants stated that medication is given out more easily than in the Netherlands, some faced their frustration in the fact that they will not get the help they need when they visit a specialist.

“For help for that? I would have to go first to the Huisarts, but ughh. The huis doctor to get anything here.....My friend went for depression, and she finally got some pills but the doctor said , ahhhh go to the forest, go hug the trees, and at once you will feel better. So that was the advice of the Huisarts.” -Emilia

Not all participants were quick to say that they would seek professional help for mental health issues faced while living here in the Netherlands. Trust issues and cultural bonds with a psychologist are reasons for inactive motivation for seeking professional help. This particular participant has been here for 20 years, and interestingly enough is not interested in seeking mental health help here in the Netherlands. On the contrary, participants who have spent a fraction of that time here have expressed interest in seeking professional health help. Her reason is below:

“For mental health no. Because you have to have this connection, this bond, to believe that they can help you. You have to really trust even the doctor, even the mental help. If the mental health help is here-great, I know but I would not. Maybe it is my personality. I would not look for mental health help here. Would I go to Poland? Maybe. Maybe I would rather go to Poland. Poland is not that far, so you always think ‘hey its not something where I am really stuck here and I never can get out of here’. But most Polish people would go to church!!! They would not go to the psychologist!” -Agata

#### **4.3.2 Religion and Church**

Church is an institution that many people use to address with guidance with mental health woes. Poland, which is a Catholic country, is home to many religious people. Nine out ten people in Poland consider themselves Catholics (Torunczyk-Ruiz, 2010). Many people find emotional refuge in a place of worship. There is one weekly Polish church service in Groningen, which many of the participants said that they either occasionally or religiously attend. Church is a place where some participants believe they can seek guidance and solitude with their issues if any are faced.

“Well, probably I will go to the church, because we are actually Catholics and we ah yeah, I don’t...I know that here in the Netherlands they don’t give so easily medicines, but I am not also this kind of person that gets depressed really quickly, like real depression. I am very talkative, so if I have problems, like big problems, I like to talk about it and I don’t have it. So I don’t think about where I would go. My friends, Polish friends, also women, they actually used help from psychologists here and they get anti depressants. I would not do that for sure. I would prefer to sleep for one week and then after wake up and start my new life (laughing).” -Hanna

#### **4.3.3 Social Supports**

Lastly, the availability of social support is key in the secondary appraisal process. Seeking professional help and going to church resources that migrants in this study either used or considered using to help benefit their mental health. Social supports, either from friendships or relationships, are extremely important resources for people living abroad. Distance from family and their roots can result in isolation, and many participants create a family by proxy in their new location. Knowing that one can connect with their social bonds when they are in need is essential to their mental health. Migrants that know that they are not alone feel more secure than migrants that lack social support.

“I don’t have family here. My whole family is in Poland. I just have my best friend, which we call each other sisters, so she also has nobody here and is studying and working. I have a lot of friends, I have a lot of Polish friends, I have a lot of international friends, Dutch friends also. I like this part.” -Maja

After the process of secondary appraisal of the stressor is complete, the subject they will engage in their own personal coping strategies and mechanism in working with overcoming their stress and /or mental health issues.

#### **4.4 Coping Strategies**

After the process of secondary appraisal of stress, the participant is able to see from their experienced stress and their resources available if they are able to cope with their situation. While participants did not visit a psychologist even though most are aware of their accessibility to their resources, participants implemented various individual coping strategies that are unique to them. For whatever reason the individual was faced with stress from a particular stressor due to migration or living abroad, each cope differently. This section will be structured to elaborate of the techniques and strategies of the participants of how they cope with stress. The structure will first range from relying on social support for help, to personally coping on their own. Main coping strategies that emerged from the in-depth interviews were relying on participants’ surrounding social supports, coping with hobbies and activities that make the participant happy, and with self-help techniques.

##### **4.4.1 Social Supports**

Social supports are imperative for many participants in this study. Talking about their issues or just even bonding with others can provide relief. Many participants cite their social bonds with fellow Polish friends and international friends; people who have experienced migration as they did. Social circles also look out for each other and provide each other with information.

“I would start speaking with friends, asking for some sort of, I don’t know, help. People here, the friends that we have here are actually amazing, really amazing. So always when we have problems, we just find a lot of help, even if we don’t ask for it, they immediately help.”  
-Hanna

“I like to go to town, if I can meet with somebody then I feel better, to make an appointment for coffee or just walk around with some friends because I like people around.” -Emilia

In addition to social support with friendships, many women find that support from their spouse or significant other is helpful. Below is an experience from a participant who describes how her social bonds with friends and boyfriends helps her when she feels down or is thinking negatively. Her friends and boyfriend accept her and love her for who she is and withhold judgement from things that she feels like people judge her for. Encouragement from others assists in motivation when either thinking negatively or when going through a difficult time. Being able to feel comfortable in a social circle where you can trust and receive support is a way of coping with doubts or negative thoughts.

“When I came to this dance world I met some really great people, they did not judge me for who I am and I felt accepted. And I could say to them that I work a certain job, that is what I am doing, and they understood. People I got to know then, I still know them and I still have contact with them and they still know what I did and what I do and what I came through. Like my boyfriend, sometimes you have these days where you are thinking ‘well I am nobody special’ you know? But he says ‘no you are a strong woman! why do you think that? You came to a foreign country, you did it on your own, you start to build your life from nothing, so you are a strong person’. So when you hear something like that you feel better and it helps you go on.”  
-Nadia

Stress due to relationship matters was a theme discussed in a previous section. Lack of a relationship or partnership, or an unfulfilling one are stressors that are faced by some participants. On the other hand, relationships with a partner are credited with being a paramount source of decreasing stress and increasing happiness and satisfaction with life. Engaging in a stable and healthy relationship with a partner in The Netherlands was considered a way of coping for select participants. Social connections and relationships were found to be important to the participants, therefore leading to a sense of contentment. As the migrant develops their new life in the Netherlands, social supports were used as a proxy for their family life back home. This security with social supports and taking time to spend time with them, and appreciate, is a form of coping. When participants were stressed, oftentimes they would reach out to their loved ones that are in close proximity, rather than contacts back home. Boyfriends and husbands are the closest connections to the women who are in relationships.

The photo below depicts what this certain participant does to cope with stress and contribute to raising her happiness. It is a photograph the participant took of her and her boyfriend spending alone time together. This participant is very close to her boyfriend and her best friend, and she considers them her family. As she is satisfied with her relationship with her boyfriend, her life to her is stable and happy, but it has been a journey to reach this moment. Living in a new location with a new career can result in missing family, friends and traditions back home, but being able to compensate those factors with new ones is extremely important to the participants’ happiness.

Figure 6. Photograph taken by Milena



“This is my happiness:) I have had up and downs before and that was strictly related to friends and boyfriends, and now it is very nice and stable because I have a very nice friend and a very nice boyfriend. I don’t want to have anything more than that.” –Milena

#### **4.4.2 Coping with Hobbies and Activities**

In addition to social support and meeting with friends, whether it is to talk about problems, or to distract from stress, many participants engage in hobbies or passions that enhance their happiness. Taking their mind off of stress and keeping occupied by doing sports or a hobby is a common mechanism for coping with stress. Whether activities or hobbies are done with others or alone, it is important to the women interviewed that they take time out of their day to do something good for themselves, to do something that makes them happy. Spending time and doing activities with friends and other social contacts is a coping mechanism to relieve stress for some participants.

“Sports are good, you can use your energy, your bad energy and then you are just getting tired and you are getting better and empty from all of those bad feelings. Meeting with friends, dates with friends, like going to a concert, something nice. I really like to bike so visiting new places by bike its really nice to discover something nice.” -Liliana

As each individual copes differently with each stressor, it is seen that some participants like to cope with stress on their own. Participants that have children and/or full time jobs like to take time for themselves by, for example, having alone time and watching a favorite film or television show. Participants who are busy with outside life appreciate coping with stress alone. When Emilia, who has two children and is a stay-at-home mother, was asked what helps her cope with stress, or provide a distraction from her stressors, she responded with a photograph to

express her strategy. Alone time engaging in pastimes is important for her to decrease stress and cope with stressors.

Figure 7. Photograph taken by Emilia

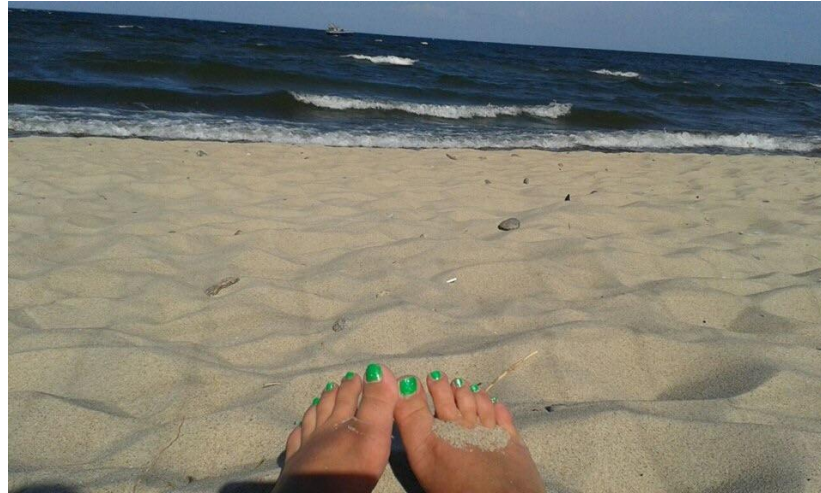


“A glass of wine and ‘Sex and The City’”- Emilia

“For sure go to the gym, body combat, or swimming. A glass of wine is also good, and a movie. I like movies very much, they release my stresses.” - Helena

Being outside and experiencing tranquility in nature is a coping strategy that some participants adopt for coping with stress. One participant took photographs of her favorite parts of nature that provide her relief. As she enjoys living in the Netherlands, knowing that her home in Poland still welcomes her, she likes to reminisce about what makes her happy there to cope. In her explanation about her photograph, she mentions ‘peace’ and ‘good memories’, and reminiscing about happy memories spent in her favorite location in nature provides relief for Maja when she is in need. Awareness of peace, tranquility, and memories of happy places are all strategies of coping for some participants.

Figure 8. Photograph taken by Maja



“This one is my happiness dreamland, the Polish seaside makes me feel so relaxed and at peace. I love this place, it is in my heart, and it brings a lot of good memories” - Maja

Figure 9. List of Outstanding Coping Strategies among Participants

<b>List of Outstanding Coping Strategies among Participants</b>
Social Support from Friendships
Social Supports from relationship/partner
Religion
Coping with Hobbies and Activities
Self- Help Techniques
Motivation

#### **4.4.3 Religion**

Religion, church and praying is a theme that has revealed itself in this research because of the prominence of catholic in the Polish culture. Coping though religious means like attending church, talking to a priest, connecting with other parishioners, and praying give some religious and faithful participants relief. Faith that God will help them overcome difficulties is an important notion to Catholic participants.

“Yes, I go to the Church every Sunday and I really believe in God. God exist, I am sure about that, because I had plenty of bad experiences that... all of the things that took place in my life... and this help that was approaching me... I was quickly noticing it. I mean, I wasn't noticing it very fast. I knew that something wrong is going on, but then I was realizing that God is helping me all the time. I believe in God.” - Julia

#### **4.4.4 Self Help Techniques and Motivation**

Lastly, when it comes to coping with stress, the final experience is to undertake how they assess their secondary appraisal of their stress and then implement ways to help themselves. When visiting a psychologist is either not possible or not desired, motivation and positivity are techniques that some participants use. Participants will utilize other methods, like being occupied or self-help to cope with their stress. The women who participated in this research were determined and dedicated to improving their lives when stress appeared.

Self-help techniques are popular among select participants. When feeling down, participants appraise their resources around them, deciding if they are in reach or not. Sometimes seeking professional help is not at the benefit of the participant, or they just simply would wish to cope on their own. Other resources like self-help books are available to read as well as activities, like mentioned in the previous section. Select participants took advantage of what self-help resources are out there and used them as a coping strategy. Kinga had a negative experience while attempting to seek professional help, and decided to access other internal and external resources instead. She has a wide range of coping strategies that she implements herself, in lieu of seeking professional help for ‘feeling down’.

“But I am always thinking “I know enough, I am intelligent, I don’t need a psychologist”. I read books, help books. I read about one month ago a Dr. Phil book (laughing) it was very funny. I try to help myself, try to go out, do nice things, and meet my friends, but sometimes I feel really down.” -Kinga

Reminiscing about happy times is a coping strategy that some participants use to get through tough times. Happiness is subjective and unmeasurable, but recognizing that it exists and was experienced is important. Not only facets of migration result in difficult times, but also stressors of responsibility of being an adult come with a price. Nadia took a photograph of a moment that brought her happiness; remembering of happy times as a child, where responsibilities are low and times were good for her. Partaking in remembering happy times triggered happiness for her. The photograph is of a little child with wings and an animal. The child looks happy and carefree, something that Nadia could identify and relate with to her happy times during her youth.

Figure 10. Photograph taken by Nadia



“I was just walking in the park. I spoke with my best friend about youth. I thought about happy days of my life. I was my childhood. And I suddenly saw this. And I saw this picture and it caught my eye, it made me feel happy and good.” –Nadia

Motivation and positivity was a priority for another participant. When she experienced stress, she credited her coping to her motivation, not only to get out of the house but to experience new things. For some participants, migration was an endeavor that was not to be given up on, no matter how difficult. Motivation to succeed and have a chance to live somewhere different gave them the incentive to overcome their stress due to migratory stressors. In the photograph below, Liliana personifies nature for her motivational and self-help coping mechanisms of her stress. Her photograph depicts a silhouette of a church against a sunset or sunrise, for some people it's the most beautiful part of the day with the colors of the sky. The sunrise is not so much the subject of the photograph as the symbolism it represents. The symbolism of the sunrise represents a new beginning every day and the ability to have the opportunity to start fresh resulting in the drive to continue through tough or stressful times. Liliana experienced depression in the beginning, right after migrating, and used her motivation and drive to experience life to cope with that stress:

Figure 11. Photograph taken by Liliana



“Every sunset and sunrise: Those beautiful moments which allow you to start something new every day”. - Liliana

## 4.5 Adapting



Adapting is the last step in the interview process where experiences were collected in accordance to how the participants have accustomed to life in the Netherlands. After experiencing migration and stress that is attributed to migrating and living in another country, migrants have two options; either to stay or to migrate again. The participants in this study have all chosen to stay at the point of the interview, with few considering returning to Poland in the future. One participant had aspirations of moving to a southern European country upon her husband's retirement. As stated in the 'stress' segment, participants faced stressors and stress ranging from relationship and familial stress, to stress being based on making another migratory decision. Overcoming or coping with stress and adapting to life in the Netherlands is imperative to these women for living a happy life. As the participants spent time in the Netherlands and adapted to life, life has become easier in some aspects. Concerns that caused them stress in the beginning have changed into things that are no longer issues. On the contrary, some matters that were not worrisome in the beginning evolved into something to worry about. For example, if a participant moved for love, the relationship could have been positive in the beginning, and the relationship ended two years later, migratory stress has developed into something different. This section describes how migration personally changed these women, how they adapted to life and stress, and their personal outcomes of migration. It will be structured from negative to positive adapting and outcomes.

#### **4.5.1 Negative Adaptations**

Unfortunately, it can be seen in the interviews that sometimes migration outcomes are not very successful. Migration can oftentimes result with negative psychological effects for an individual (Bhugra & Jones, 2010), and sometimes this can result in feeling pessimistic or unhappy. As this only occurred in certain cases, some women cite that migration has led them to think more negatively about everyday life and situations. As this situation below is unique, this certain participant shared in her interview that she generally does not like living in Holland, although the situation and dislikes are improving as the years go on.

"I think in Holland I became more negative about everything. My husband is saying 'you are so negative about everything, you don't like anything here'. So probably I have become more negative about everything. Maybe I am shouting more because I was angry and I did not like. I am putting my frustration on my husband and fighting more. That is true here. That's why he is saying sometimes, 'ahh well you better go back, because you don't like it here' then you are angry. and I think 'maybe'. He says this like I don't belong like, its more like inside, not like I cannot live here, but it's not my country, like mental I don't belong here in Holland, I'm completely different." -Emilia

#### **4.5.2 Negative to Positive Adaptations**

As adapting can take some time, sometimes stress from migrating can turn your outlook into negative and pessimistic, but the more time spent in the Netherlands adapting to life and a career, viewpoints can change. Cultural barriers and family dynamics and pressure can serve as obstacles to the speed of adaptation, as we can see in the quote below. Social support provides a source of positivity and independence. The ability to support oneself on their own is an accomplishment, and something that makes adapting in a new place smoother. Another contributing circumstance is the time spent in a new locale, and the experiences that the participant has experienced. Below,

the participant also states the length of time spent in the Netherlands, something that is also a contributing factor to adapting after migrating.

“So first migration changed me to a very, very negative person. In the beginning here I was just complaining. I was just going to work, I was complaining. I was coming back from work, I was complaining. I noticed at some point that I am just complaining, when I spoke about something, it was always in a negative manner. Like ‘oh this is stupid’ ‘this colleague, that colleague’, even if the colleague was nice ok, but she has these negative features, the other one has these negative features (laughing). So negative. I had a lot of people surrounding me that were very nice, very helpful, and very positive. I was always thinking about a lot of stuff in a very negative way. So we were kind of like ‘uhhhhh this is very stressful’. Right now, since we are alone [without relatives living and helping], we think about life more positively. And we meet more friends, before we were like ‘oh grandma is at home alone, we don’t want to leave her staying,’ so our social life actually improved. We have wonderful friends so right now we are actually very, very positive about life. So facing this culture turned me to a very negative person, but it also made me stronger. So now I know, after these 4 years of experience, we can actually do a lot. After you think I am strong I am good!” -Hanna

After experiencing the fluctuations of migratory situations, some participants realized that they could accomplish anything after migrating. Migration made them face issues and events that removed them from their comfort zones. Events like struggling and succeeding to learn a new language and surrounding themselves in a different culture are matters that would not occur to them if they remained in Poland. Persevering through difficult or stressful times gave them hope and courage to do more things in their future. Migration also gave them confidence in themselves.

“It was first negative, because I first had some ups and downs. But I have realized that if you are positive that something good can happen, you are more open to this actually. And if you have good people around you then they support you, even with small words like my boyfriend tells me that I am a strong woman. Then you know that you can survive, you can do with whatever is going to happen and no matter how difficult or heavy it can be, it will be good. It’s going to be good. My motto in life through all of these years is “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”. And it’s true, I am still alive.” -Nadia

“I don’t think that the difficult times in my life have made me stronger. But I think that migration has made me grown up. And also more open. Because of meeting new people, and coping with different situations, not so stress. It depends on the amount of stress that you have, the level. So if is not so big, you still have to cope with different situations that are outside of your comfort zone. You are out of the family, you have to rent an apartment. You know when I was living there I was in an apartment that they bought for me, I was spoiled (laughing). I am an adult and take care of myself and find different jobs because I was switching a lot. It gave me new perspective and more strength. Then you can say, ‘oh I can do it’ this is the thing.” -Helena

### **4.5.3 Positive Adaptations**

As migration gave participants confidence in themselves, some women are sure that they will not return to Poland, regardless if they will remain in The Netherlands or not. Migration gave some participants the determination to excel in their life as a migrant, wherever they go. She is single and believes all opportunities are ahead of her, not back in Poland. Migration does have

many positive effects like feeling more liberated to move on with life, if one has already lived and overcame previous migratory stressors (in her case, profound loneliness at the beginning).

Liliana- “I am much more happy here. I am much more happy, I am free, I feel totally different than in Poland. Better, much more better. I have really grown.”

Interviewer- “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?”

Liliana- “If I will not find a way to live anymore here in Groningen, I will try to find another place but I will not go back to Poland. I am not the person that will go back to something that was old and was not really good for me. I would try to find happiness somewhere else.”

Not only is Liliana determined to continue her life outside of Poland, she has adopted a pet, who she credits with her independence and happiness. To adopt and care for a pet, or any other investment of money and time, can signify the choice of staying where one is. Having responsibility for something else other than oneself is a liability, but also can symbolize contentment in where someone is. Adapting to a location, and choosing to stay, one can make the decision to commit to something, like a pet, that adds to their life. Liliana is planning to stay in the Netherlands for the next few years, and her pet is a positive contribution to her busy life.

Figure 12. Photograph taken by Liliana



“My pet makes me happy, like every creature which needs our care.” - Liliana

Lastly, adjusting to life in the Netherlands, or any other country with a different culture, some participants stated that one must change their mindset and their outlook if one wants to be able to live successfully in the Netherlands. Adapting to the new culture as well as the local language are the first steps, but having a positive outlook appears to be the most important. Without motivation or an open mind to experience the culture, one might not succeed.

“This is a difference and I can see that Dutch people don’t like that. If you try to

“speak Dutch then they are looking at you a little bit different. So if you want to stay here you have to change your mind, you cannot be negative with everything., because is not going to work.” -Maja

As adapting to migration, stressors, and life in the Netherlands, all women interviewed had unique adaptation outcomes. Their mindsets, outlooks, and development were key aspects in the progress of their personal adaptation process.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion**

This study aims to identify the stressors due to migration and the coping mechanisms among first generation Polish migrant women living in Groningen, the Netherlands. Through in-depth interviews, experiences were collected and analyzed. The results in the previous section demonstrate how first generation female migrants from Poland to the Netherlands cope with their stress from migratory stressors.

### **5.1 Conclusions of the research process**

Throughout this study, the results were managed and analyzed in a way that reflected the conceptual model in Chapter 2. The results were organized within the main themes of the model. While most themes like (migratory) stress, coping strategies, and adapting were less challenging to conceptualize, primary and secondary appraisal or stressors and stress deemed to be more difficult. As each individual participant processes her stressors and stress differently, each appraisal outcome was not as clear. A critique was sometimes these appraisals ran together, but for the most part they were more or less clear. Other than particular drawbacks, the conceptual model and Theory of The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping was able to successfully frame the research design and data collection process. The objective of this study was to explore how female Polish migrants in the Netherlands individually cope with psychological stressors that result from migration, and with relation to the relevant literature, the researched expected to have a variety of results among the participants. Seeing that Poland is part of the European Union, and migration between Poland and the Netherlands is unregulated, visas and other migratory bureaucratic barriers that were once necessary are now obsolete. It was expected that through qualitative in-depth interviews and photo elicitation methods would reveal the stressors and coping strategies of the study group.

The main research questions that the study aimed to justify are: *What are the psychological/mental health stressors that first generation female migrants from Poland face when living and/or working in the Netherlands? What coping strategies do first generation female Polish migrants adopt when faced with psychological stressors due to their life living as an immigrant in the Netherlands?*

As each participant migrated from the same country of origin, Poland, experiences differed depending on their contexts. No two stories were the same. A number of the participants migrated for love, or reunification with a spouse, while others had motives of financial gain or career opportunities. As migration experiences vary, some general conclusions can be drawn.

## **5.2 'What are the psychological/mental health stressors that female migrants from Poland face when living and/or working in the Netherlands?'**

In response to the first research question, '*What are the psychological/mental health stressors that female migrants from Poland face when living and/or working in the Netherlands?*', the psychological/mental health stressors that female migrants from Poland face when living and/or working in the Netherlands vary among the participants. Conclusions can be drawn from specific stressors that were most common in the experiences of the participants.

Stress does exist among the Polish female migrants in the Netherlands that were interviewed, regardless of their socioeconomic status or career. Preeminent migratory stressors that appeared in the interview process consisted of finding work, finding housing, and finding a new social circle/social support. Female migrants interviewed experienced at least one or more of these stressors either upon migrating or afterwards. Participants, who had a secured job before migrating, whether that is a housekeeper or a PhD researcher, had little to no stress contributed to finding or attending work. Stress for participants with pre-migration secured jobs attributed their stress during migration to finding housing, lack of social support, and leaving family behind. Of those participants who were migrating because of a career, most cited that their migration process was easier when compared to other women's situations that they know.

Participants who did not migrate for work, and did not have a secured job prospect before migrating experienced stress with finding a job. Women who migrated for their spouse or to pursue a relationship are women of this category. As migrating to the Netherlands was an exciting prospect due to the fact that love was involved, other difficulties arose. Learning Dutch and finding a job were post-migratory priorities, and to these women, finding a decent job was impossible without a grasp of the language. Personal pressure to advance in the language; find a fitting career, and exploring their own friendships were imperative for women that migrated for love.

Lack of social support is a crucial stressor for participants as a whole. This notion was expected can be supported by the existing literature (Bhugra, 2004; Afifi, 2007; Hiott et al. 2008; Zaleska et al., 2014). Women in this study who experienced lack of social support or family life upon migrating experienced the most amount of stress and the highest, most intense primary appraisal of stressors. Participants who experienced isolation and missing social ties felt the most 'down' or depressed out of the rest of the participants. This is relative to previous research that issues lack of social or family bonds has the strongest relationship to stress in a migratory context (Hiott et al. 2008).

Another issue for participants that migrated for love is that most were at the will of their partners, especially if that partner was Dutch. Failed relationships were a stressor that is a key linkage to stress. If a Polish women and a Dutch partner ended a relationship while both living in the Netherlands, it was the woman who experienced the biggest disturbance. From experiences gathered from the participants, family and relationship related stress was significant. Participants with a family and children worried more for the welfare of their children and spousal relationship, while participants who were engaged in an unmarried partnership did not have the double burden.

As women experienced stressors, every participant was able to assess their situation and how it affected them. Some participants reacted differently than others to their stressors, depending on the context of their situations and their personal resilience. While steps were being taken by utilizing their resources in their secondary appraisal, participants had various mental health help seeking behaviors. Age and employment status of the participant had no relation for seeking psychological help. Trust in the Dutch general health and mental health care systems were the motivation for seeking professional help in the Netherlands. Many participants did not trust Dutch psychologists, and would rather seek help another way, more specifically through religion or church.

### **5.3 ‘What coping strategies do female Polish migrants adopt when faced with psychological stressors due to their life living as an immigrant in the Netherlands?’**

In accordance to the second research question, *‘What coping strategies do female Polish migrants adopt when faced with psychological stressors due to their life living as an immigrant in the Netherlands?’*, coping strategies also differed among participants and resulted in a variety of techniques. The main coping strategies found in this study group were reaching out to social support from friendships and partnerships, coping with religion, coping with hobbies and activities, implementing self-help and motivational techniques. Either participants prefer to cope on their own or spend time with others. Individual coping strategies ranged from participating in activities and hobbies that improve their happiness. Many participants exemplified that engaging in sports or going to the gym helps them release negative energy, and taking part of their favorite hobbies and passions like dance and seeing a movie aids in coping with stress.

The most profound result stemming from individual coping strategies was that many participants affirmed that they turn to their friends and significant others for guidance and security when facing tough times, or when ‘feeling down’. Those social supports deem to be the most important aspects in many of the participant’s lives in the Netherlands. Without these current social supports, many felt isolated and depressed. Social supports to the participants ranged from social circles, to best friends, to boyfriends and significant others. Participants who had families with children had different strategies, because their priorities were primarily about the welfare of their children. These women had different social life structures, and they credited their children with helping them cope with tough times. Motivation to make sure the children were ok was in their best interest.

### **5.4 Discussion and Future Recommendations**

Gender, migration and mental health are topics, previously mentioned in the chapter of theoretical framework, that are not thoroughly explored when combined. Gender differences within mental health, combined with mental health and migration are complicated and intricate. There is much more to be discovered, especially amongst this particular study population. The results show that each participant can assess the same stress differently, and have different views of health seeking behavior, regardless of originating from the same country, in this case Poland. Nevertheless, migratory stressors are present in each participant, and the time ranges for these stressors vary. As some participants required professional psychological attention, and others relied on their personal coping strategies, mental health seeking behaviors differ.

Knowledge of how migrant women in the Netherlands, not just in a Polish context, cope with migratory stressors could lead to advances in improvement in mental health care systems in host

countries. As physical health is more apparent and viewed potentially more pressing because it can be seen, people that suffer from mental health issues often do so behind closed doors. Because migrants are more vulnerable than native populations, much can be done to make sure the mental welfare of the migrant is something that is not overlooked.

Further advancements in this study could consist of distinguishing migration and mental health between careers of migrants. Since the participants of this study did not work in laborious jobs in agriculture, like many female Polish migrants in the Netherlands do, it would be imperative to explore that specific circumstance affects mental health of female migrants. Another advancement would be to observe the mental health of first-generation female migrants who originate from different backgrounds who have all migrated to the Netherlands. It can emphasize how different cultures impact mental health. In addition migrant women who come from different political/bureaucratic/migratory statuses can be explored, compared and contrasted with their mental health and stressors that are experienced.

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**Appendix  
Informed Consent**

**Informed Consent**

Master of Science in Population Studies

Faculty of Spatial Sciences

I, hereby consent to take part in the study entitled ***“Gender, Migration and Mental Health: The coping strategies of migratory stressors of female Polish migrants in The Netherlands”***. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. My responses in the interview process will be kept anonymous. I have the option to withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty, and I also have the right to request that my responses will not be used.

I have also understood the following points

1. The goal of this study is to understand how stresses from migration affect Polish women living in The Netherlands. Coping mechanisms will be explored.
2. The interview process should last approximately 30-45 minutes.
3. Depending on the situation, the participant might be asked to take pictures of aspects of their lives where they feel stressed, or aspects of their lives that relieve stress.
4. The content of the interview and photos will be anonymous, meaning that nothing can be traced back to the participant as an individual.
5. If you have any questions regarding the research, or if you are interested in the results of the study, please contact the supervisor of the researcher at [a.bailey@rug.nl](mailto:a.bailey@rug.nl)

Date:

Signature of Researcher:

Signature of Participant:

## **Interview Guide**

First start out with written consent, as well as background of study and importance

### **Part 1-Introduction questions, Background**

- 1) Introduction/ background questions (to be asked chronologically in a conversation style)
  - Age (or year that they were born)
  - Name (not actually needed, because anonymous)
  - Profession
  - Age at the time of migrating to the Netherlands
  - Time spent in the Netherlands
  - Reason for migrating
  - Who lives with you at home?
  - Where did you live before living in Groningen?
- 2) How do you find life in the Netherlands? Likes and dislikes?
- 3) Describe a typical day, what do you do?
- 4) >If employed, where do you work, how do you find work, and what are the aspects of work that you like and dislike?
- 5) Could you describe your social/family life in the Netherlands?

### **Part 2- Body Questions**

- 6) How would you describe the migration process to the Netherlands? (What were the difficulties faced? What came easy?)
- 7) How have you overcome these difficulties while migrating?
- 8) What events/issues created stress in your life while migration to The Netherlands?
  - i. Probe about bureaucratic issues
  - ii. Probe about leaving family, finding housing, finding job
- 9) What are some stressors faced now that you are settled in the Netherlands?
  - i. Probe about language and cultural barriers
  - ii. Probe about social circles/support
  - iii. How have your relationships changed after migration?
- 10) Which stressors stick out in your mind of being the most stressful or burdensome?
  - i. Probe about gender issues, double burden of family
  - ii. Probe about career, remittances if applicable
- 11) Where would you go to seek help with mental health issues faced while living in The Netherlands?
  - i. Probe with religion, [professional] healthcare systems

- 12) What are your personal coping strategies that you implement to cope with living as a migrant in the Netherlands?
  - i. Probe with social support, activities, motivation tactics, leisure, etc.
- 13) Which coping strategies have been most effective at coping with stressors faced?
- 14) How has migration affected your mental health?
  - i. Probe with living situation, perceived happiness
  - ii. Probe with comparing mental health to Poland and mental health in the Netherlands

**Part 3- Conclusion**

- 15) What are your future aspirations?
- 16) Do you plan to stay in the Netherlands?
- 17) (Other lighter questions if applicable)

**Part 4- Introduction for Photo Elicitation**

-Introduce the participant information sheet and what is asked from the participant

## **Participant Information Sheet**

Requirements for Photo Elicitation for Research for:

“Gender, Migration, and Mental Health: The coping strategies of migratory stressors of female Polish migrants in The Netherlands”

This research, along with in depth interview participation, will involve a process called photo elicitation. This data collection method involves the participant to take photos of a concept discussed in the research. The photos will be from the participants’ own perspective. Photos allow the research to be presented in a dynamic way.

It is the participant’s decision whether they would like to participate in the photo elicitation process. All photos will preserve anonymity; therefore no description in the presentation of the research will be traced back to the individual who took the photo.

### **Requirements**

1. Kindly do not take pictures of children or others who are not able to consent in their participation in the research. Photos of children will not be included in the research.
2. Write a brief description of what the photo is of and why this particular photo is important to you, and how it relates to the research.
3. Pictures and descriptions can be sent to the researcher by email or text, whichever is more convenient as discussed (email: m.gintowt@student.rug.nl)
4. The purpose of the photos will be to
  - a. Give a visual interpretation of the data collected from the participants
  - b. Provide a more dynamic manner of interpreting the data to readers of the thesis
  - c. Allow the participants to express their views through photos and art

5. If there are any question regarding the research or the photo elicitation process, or if you are interested in the results of this study, please contact [a.bailey@rug.nl](mailto:a.bailey@rug.nl)