Forced migration and displacement are often associated with increased exposure to various risks that negatively affect personal safety. While experiences of displaced populations are heterogeneous, women have been shown to be exposed to intersecting factors, such as vulnerability to gender-based violence, restricting cultural norms and discrimination. Being a mother—or at least responsible for the care of a child—while en route stands as another marginalizing factor. This article’s point of departure is the so-called European ‘refugee crisis’ that peaked in 2015 and examines the effects of gender and family on the experience of safety among refugees in six refugee centres in Greece. We explore how intersecting issues such as gender roles and being responsible for children impact individuals’ feelings of safety. Using descriptive statistics and regression analyses of survey data on 367 migrants in six Greek refugee centres, we find that female migrants are more likely to feel unsafe compared to males. However, our results indicate that gender differences in feelings of safety are minimal for those without children. While having children affects both genders’ feeling of safety, the effect is much greater for women than for men. Our conclusion is that dissimilar experiences of safety along gender dimension are conditioned by norms and obligations inscribed in social roles of parents and care-givers.

Keywords: refugees, gender, safety, parenthood

Introduction

A central part of the ‘refugee experience’ is the negation of safety (Stein 1981). Throughout the entire duration of their flight, refugees are exposed
to various factors resulting in physical, mental and emotional distress (Ryan et al. 2008). While forced migration impacts a displaced population in its entirety, aspects such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status intersect and result in differing vulnerabilities (Pittaway and Pittaway 2004). Studies have illustrated how factors such as exposure to different forms of violence, inability to fulfil parental obligations, unadjusted accommodation facilities or inadequate protection in reception centres may affect the situation of female refugees negatively. As the body of research grows, it is becoming increasingly clear that this too applies to refugees and other migrants (see Carling (2017) for a discussion on terminology) who sought sanctuary around the Mediterranean during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, which saw its peak in 2015 (Freedman 2016a, 2016b; Oxfam 2016; Kofman 2018).

Based on a new survey dataset from Greek refugee camps, we undertake a quantitative analysis of how gender and children affect the experiences of safety among refugees. Note that we use the terms ‘refugee centres’ and ‘refugee camps’ interchangeably in this article when referring to the Greek refugee centres in question. In our analysis, we particularly wish to shed light on how family responsibilities are unevenly distributed and that this may lead to different experiences of displacement. To contextualize the analysis, we briefly review existing research on refugees, safety, gender and family. A presentation of the data and research design will then follow, before we continue to a description and discussion of the regression analyses. We find that, while gender has a crucial role in determining feeling of safety, its effects are highly contingent on whether the person has children.

**Forced Migration and Experiences of Safety**

**Refugees and Safety**

Safety, understood as the experience of being protected from threat and danger, is one of the fundamental human needs. In the case of displaced populations, physical and psychological distress are constituents of each phase of the refugee journey: from the expatriation from the host country, endangerment en route, to uncertainty about the future (Fazel and Stein 2002). Repression of physical integrity, involuntary separation from the original social context, relocation for unspecified periods of time, economic instability or isolation are all among factors that may lead to erosion of refugees’ feeling of safety (Abdi 2005). Though numbers vary between contexts, the refugee-associated adversities result in a prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression that is higher than in the general population (Fazel et al. 2005; Turrini et al. 2017; Farhat et al. 2018).

**Gender, Parenthood and Safety**

Men and women are dissimilarly affected by, and may cope differently with, risks encountered during the refugee journey (Gerard and Pickering 2014).
Women migrants, for instance, face an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as well as other forms of abuse while fleeing—both en route and in transit (Vu et al. 2014; Parker 2015; Yasmine and Moughalian 2016; Bosworth et al. 2017; Grotti et al. 2018). The fact that gender has been invoked as a membership of a social group (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2007: 81–84) in fulfilling the criteria of persecution of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1 A(2) strengthens the notion that refugee women can be a particularly vulnerable group. Relating to migrants coming to Europe through the Mediterranean routes, Freedman found that women had been subject to rape, sexual assault and bodily harm by human smugglers, violence at the hand of border guards and police, conjugal violence, as well as additional stress caused by the fear that their children would be subjected to similar kinds of violence (Freedman 2016b). Based on this, we deduce an initial hypothesis:

**H1:** Women will have a lower sense of security compared with men, independently of other factors.

However, while parts of the literature appear to make such a hypothesis reasonable, we expect that the difference between genders is highly contingent upon other factors. Women are often portrayed as being forced to flee by external pressure and because their surroundings leave no other choice, while men are depicted as instrumentally rational, moving through economically motivated strategies (Stock 2012: 1579; Freedman 2015, 2016b). Female refugees, when compared to male, have also been argued to not only flee conflict areas in pursuit of a more secure situation for themselves, but also for the sake of their children (Freedman 2016a: 570). In other words, in existing literature, the push-factors shaping the forced migration of women often differ from those of male migrants; the ‘migration thresholds’ of women (van der Velde and van Naerssen 2011; Mallett and Hagen-Zanker 2018) appear to be directly impacted by children, in a different way than what we find for male refugees. This does not imply that women are necessarily more altruistic or caring than men, but that that social expectations and duties may impact their migration patterns in differing ways.

Children also influence parents’ or care-givers’ experiences of trauma and stress after leaving the country of origin. Based on a cross-sectional population-based survey among refugees in the United States, Robertson et al. (2006) find that women with large families and many children reported higher degrees of trauma and stress. Pertaining to the experience of refugee camps, Rasmussen and Annan (2010: 34) find a negative effect on the number of sons as increasing women’s worries for everyday life in refugee camps. Looking at the Greek context, Farhat et al. (2018: 6) and Grotti et al. (2018) note how refugees in Greek refugee centres spend much time worrying about the safety of themselves as well as their children.
Having children, however, can impact the parent or care-giver in different ways; the presence and the absence of a child may both generate stress, albeit of dissimilar nature. A recent study conducted in Lebanon among Syrian refugees finds that family separation is central to reduced feelings of safety (Keith and Shawaf 2017: 8). As mentioned above, female refugees often experience a different array of intersecting risks than men. Women are the primary care-givers for children among Syrian refugees, which has been found to cause immense stress for them in the context of displacement (El-Masri et al. 2013; El-Khani et al. 2016: 109). In a survey on Syrian refugees in Greece, female respondents reported ‘a significantly increased risk of [major depressive disorder] compared to men’—a condition exacerbated by each child they had (Poole et al. 2018: 5).

Based on the above, we find it reasonable to say that a considerable part of the difference between genders is down to differing social roles, and that a large part of this is tied to childcare. We assume that experiences of safety and wellbeing are likely to be directly impacted by children, but also that we can reasonably say that this is more likely to be true for women than for men. We therefore add two hypotheses:

H2: Having children leads to a lower sense of security, independently of other factors.

H3: The effect of having children and accompanying them is greater for women than it is for men.

In short, the existing body of literature indicates that the experiences of displaced populations are affected by gender. By this, we do not mean that men and women by default experience displacement dissimilarly, but rather that gendered risks of violence, stress and differing parental obligations intersect and cause some experiences to be more likely to impact women negatively.

Camps and Safety

In addition to our main interest in gender and family, we will also control for other aspects of the refugee experience. Refugee camps are generally understood in terms of the humanitarian aid they provide, but the stay in the camp can be an ambivalent experience (Feldman 2015; Turner 2015). The standards of accommodation, hygiene, sustenance, access to health care as well as levels of protection and security vary greatly between the camps in Greece (Blitz et al. 2017) and some camps have been found to be particularly detrimental to refugees’ mental health and wellbeing (Farhat et al. 2018). Furthermore, restrictions concerning entry requirements to third countries (Janmyr 2016), concerns about the legitimacy of the refugees (Feldman 2015) and the feeling of uncertainty that comes from a long stay in refugee camps (Coterrill et al. 2016; Grotti et al. 2018) may have a negative effect on the individual sense of security. Rasmussen and Annan (2010) have also shown how structural and
material factors of a refugee camp can induce stress in refugees. Prolonged stays in detrimental living conditions in Greek reception centres have been argued to increase feelings of discrimination and social marginalization (Farhat et al. 2018: 8), as well as increased experiences of trauma (Poole et al. 2018). Both the camp itself and the time spent in it may thus affect feelings of safety.

**Demographic Characteristics and Other Factors**

Age can also affect migrants’ feeling of safety. Older refugees, for instance, have been shown to report lower levels of stress when living in refugee camps (Rasmussen and Annan 2010: 34). In contrast to this, Robertson et al. (2006) found that older age and lower levels of education are associated with a higher probability of being exposed to issues of trauma and torture. Note, however, that the latter study was conducted among refugees settled in a safe country of asylum.

Finally, trauma from the conflict or the context the refugee is fleeing from, as well as violence encountered while travelling, are also likely to impact current wellbeing. A survey in refugee camps in Eastern Chad found that present-day stressors linked to safety and material needs correlated more strongly with their overall experiences of distress than war-related trauma of the past (Rasmussen et al. 2010). Similarly, ‘feelings of safety and security have been shown to mediate the effects of past exposure to violence or abuse’ (Overstreet and Braun 2000, in Bermudez et al. 2018: 84; see also Miller and Rasmussen 2010). At the same time, Syrian refugees in Greek camps reported a higher prevalence of anxiety if their journey had lasted for more than two months (Farhat et al. 2018: 8). This could indicate that the context of the camp can mediate some of the trauma encountered en route, but that this is contingent on the characteristics of the journey.

**Data and Research Design**

Our data comes from the REHEAL dataset, the result of a survey conducted by the National Centre of Social Research of Greece in connection with the MIGHEAL project. The survey was conducted in Greek refugee camps in 2016 at six locations: Eleonas, Skaramagas and Schisto in and near Athens, Diavata and Veroia near Thessaloniki and on the island of Samos. Data was collected through self-completed questionnaires in English, Arabic or Farsi, with questions focusing on the respondents’ health, wellbeing, migratory journey and background. The sample size was 367 individuals, with the majority coming from Syria and Afghanistan, and smaller numbers from various African and Middle-Eastern countries.

For a more in-depth discussion of the dataset and context of the study, see introduction (this special issue).
Safety

The questionnaire asked the respondents directly about their feeling of safety, where they could respond on a four-point ordinal scale. In our main analysis, we simply scale these from 1 to 4, with 1 being the least safe and 4 the safest. Robustness checks were also run with safety as a dichotomized variable (safe/unsafe).

Family

Respondents were asked whether they had children—and, if so, how many. They were also asked whether they travelled with children, although it is unclear whether these were specified to be their own children or relatives. We make the assumption that respondents who report both having children and travelling with children are travelling with children for whom they function as a parent. In our analysis, we use the number of reported children and a dichotomous variable for whether the person is accompanying children or not. To examine the family-fragmentation hypothesis, we include an interaction between the two family variables, and between them and the respondent’s stated gender.

Other Variables

To measure time spent in camp, we use a question in which the respondents were asked how long ago they arrived in Greece. We make the assumption that they were transferred to the camps immediately and convert their answers to number of days in Greece.

Education level is measured on a six-point scale, from no education to more than 12 years of schooling. In our analysis, we used the full six-point scale, but robustness tests were run with dichotomized education variables.

To control for the effects of trauma along the way, we include a dummy variable, which is coded as positive if the respondent reports at least one of a number of a set of traumatic experiences. The questionnaire also includes questions on whether the respondents feel that they have been subject to discrimination either at home, along the way or in Greece. While not directly traumatic, discrimination is likely to lead to a lack of trust in others and therefore a lower feeling of safety. We include a discrimination dummy variable that is coded positive if any discrimination question is answered positively.

We also control for age, which is coded from a direct question.

Results

Table 1 displays selected descriptive statistics from our data, grouped by camp and gender. It shows that REHEAL has roughly the same gender and age distribution as that found by the UNHCR (2017), with a gender...
## Table 1

### Average Responses by Camp and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Eleonas</th>
<th>Samos</th>
<th>Schisto</th>
<th>Skaramagas</th>
<th>Veroia</th>
<th>Diavata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of safety</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>35.25</td>
<td>33.05</td>
<td>36.48</td>
<td>33.25</td>
<td>36.70</td>
<td>30.37</td>
<td>34.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling with kids</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days in Greece</td>
<td>180.07</td>
<td>146.0</td>
<td>118.7</td>
<td>213.4</td>
<td>203.6</td>
<td>200.8</td>
<td>190.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
distribution of roughly 60 per cent male and 40 per cent female. The average feeling of safety varies by a whole point, with Diavata the least safe and Eleonas the safest. The average age does not vary much between camps, but Schisto appears to host less-educated refugees than other camps. We see no direct impact of this, as Schisto scores above average on safety.

The average person has 2.67 children, with a somewhat even distribution among camps. Looking solely at children and safety, there is no obvious connection between the two at the camp level. The camp with the highest average number of children, Veroia, has an average feeling of safety slightly above that of the average between camps. The two camps with the fewest children are Eleonas and Samos. While Eleonas has the fewest children and highest feeling of safety, Samos has marginally more children but is close to the average feeling of safety.

Split by gender, we can see traces of correlation; the group with the lowest feeling of safety among our respondents is women in Diavata, which is also the group with the most children. Apart from in Veroia, feelings of safety below the average correspond with numbers of children above the average and vice versa. For men, there is no clear relationship between safety and children.

Time spent in the camps appears roughly similar across the respondents in all six locations, with no visible impact on the feeling of safety in the camp. Both the trauma and discrimination variables appear very similar between camps and the camps with more extreme values are all near the average on safety. It is worth noting that three-quarters of our respondents have experienced some form of trauma and almost 90 per cent report experiencing discrimination.

In addition to the variables in Table 1, we looked at reasons given for leaving the third country, where 69 per cent of women cited a lack of security as a reason for moving on, compared to 58 per cent of the men. Due to the low number of respondents and the low response rate on a number of questions, few of the differences in group means are statistically significant. The only highly significant find is that women cite family reunion as a reason for moving on from third countries far more often than men (64.2 per cent vs 40 per cent, significant at a 0.001 level).

Table 2 shows the results of our ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses. The number of respondents who answered all the relevant questions (213) is quite small. In addition, our main hypothesis, H3, requires a three-way interaction that will inflate our standard errors considerably. We therefore first report the results of models with only our models of interest and add single two-way interactions to build our argument before presenting the full model. Further, while a fixed- or mixed-effects analysis would fit our data structure better, the low number of units per camp means that only the strongest and clearest effects retain statistical significance. We do show the results of a fixed- and a mixed-effects model (Models 6 and 7) to illustrate
### Table 2

**Regressions Models**

Effects on feeling of safety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feeling of safety</th>
<th>OLS</th>
<th>FE OLS</th>
<th>Multilevel OLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.013**</td>
<td>0.011**</td>
<td>0.012**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Days in Greece</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.308***</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>-0.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.118)</td>
<td>(0.191)</td>
<td>(0.226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.083**</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>-0.082**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling with children</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.116</td>
<td>-0.103</td>
<td>-0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.141)</td>
<td>(0.141)</td>
<td>(0.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.297*</td>
<td>0.274*</td>
<td>0.282**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.153)</td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.144)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.395**</td>
<td>-0.453**</td>
<td>-0.449**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
<td>(0.186)</td>
<td>(0.180)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female*Kids</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.134)</td>
<td>(0.200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female*Trvl w/children</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.215</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
<td>-0.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.267)</td>
<td>(0.388)</td>
<td>(0.462)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids*Trvl w/children</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.077)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female*Trvl w/children</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.155)</td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
<td>(0.203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td></td>
<td>287</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.
that effect directions and sizes are in the same ballpark when attempting to control for unobserved differences between camps.

Model 1 shows that the only significant control variable is age, where older refugees report a higher feeling of safety. The gender variable is significant and shows that women on average report a feeling of safety 0.3 units lower than men. Considering that the scale goes from 1 to 4, this is a substantial difference. The effect of number of children is also significant and, for each child, there is a reduction in their feeling of safety of almost 0.1 units—regardless of gender or other variables. As an example, the effect of having four children is roughly the same as the difference between genders. While negative, the dummy for whether a person is travelling with children or not is not significant.

In Model 2, we interact gender with the respondents’ number of children. The effect sizes of both variables are now reduced and neither is statistically significant, with gender a fraction of the size compared to Model 1. The interaction effect shows that, compared to men, women see an additional
reduction in feeling of safety of almost 0.1 points for each child. Although the effect is not shown as significant in the regression table, Figure 1 shows that the effect of children is only significant for women, while not for men. Read differently, the effect of gender is insignificant except for those in the middle range of children (the loss of significance at higher numbers of children can be explained by the very low number of respondents with more than five children).

In Model 3, we interact gender with whether the person is travelling with children, rather than whether they have children. The effect of gender is still much weaker than with no interactions and is not significant, while the effect of travelling with children is halved. The interaction term has an effect that more than makes up for the lost strength of gender and Figure 2 shows that, while the effect of travelling with children is far from significant, the effect of gender does become significant for people travelling with children.

In Model 4, we interact gender with both child variables at the same time. As a result of including all interactions at once, our coefficients are now hard to interpret directly and the standard errors of the variables involved are
inflated. To make sense of things, the effects are shown in Figure 3. On the left and right-hand sides of the plot, we see the effect of children for those travelling without and with them, respectively. The dashed lines represent the effects for men, while the whole lines represent the effects for women. On the left, the effect of children is very strong for women, with the feeling of safety being halved when comparing a woman with six children to one with none. Although it is very strong, the effect is only significant when comparing those with extremely low and high numbers of children. For men, the effect is still negative but much weaker, and nowhere near significant. On the right, for those travelling with their children, the effect is weakened. The effect is still stronger for women than for men, and still only significant with extreme changes. Unlike those travelling without children, there is in this group a significant difference between men and women, but crucially this is only for those with approximately three to five children.

As the feeling of safety may well be caused by other factors, we control for traumatic experiences and discrimination in Model 5, but there is no major difference in the combined effects of our variables of interest. Perhaps not surprisingly, the effects of both trauma and discrimination are significant and relatively strong. Those who have experienced traumas have a higher average feeling of safety, while those who have experienced discrimination report a lower average. Including these variables reduced our $n$ considerably and none of our other variables is now significant.

Robustness Testing

As we have mentioned, the feeling of safety can depend on not just the time spent in camp, but also on the camps themselves. To control for such differences, we re-ran all our models with camp fixed effects and as multilevel
models with random intercepts varying between camps. The results from these models corresponded to a high degree with the results of the regular OLS models. Model 6 shows the fixed-effects results, while Model 7 shows the multilevel model. The overall picture remains mostly the same in both models, with the main exception being that the effect of the female and travelling with children interaction has moved to the gender variable. When plotting the effect, the models appear very similar to the OLS results apart from an increased effect of number of children for women travelling without children. Perhaps of interest—but not to be discussed further here—is that the effect of education is now significant and negative, meaning those more educated feel less safe.

In addition to Models 6 and 7, we ran a number of robustness checks with fixed effects and random intercept models grouped on nationality, with all methods returning similar results to our OLS models. We also ran the models using an ordinal logit estimator, with very similar results.

Further checks were made with OLS models including dummy variables for ethnicities, with results not shifting. Syrians feel significantly less safe than Afghans, but the overall results are stable.

As the safety, number of children and education variables had few possible responses, we tested the models with dichotomous variables (safe/unsafe, kids/no kids, lower/higher education). Logit models on a dichotomous safety variable appear less stable, with higher standard errors, but the directions of effects remain the same. OLS models using dichotomous variables for children agree with models using a linear variable.

Discussion

We find only partial support for H1 and H2. The effects of gender and number of children, while consequently negative in direction through all our models and robustness tests, are never significant on their own once interaction terms are added.

Our findings show that the effect of children—either due to having children or accompanying them—is greater for women than for men, supporting our H3. In our sample, the effect of gender alone is minimal when controlling for these factors. We therefore argue that the experienced safety of many refugee women not only depends on stress they face as women, but also the additional pressure of being mothers or responsible for children. While social expectations may dictate that women are expected to provide children with immediate care, these norms exacerbate the anxieties and risks of displacement.

We also find, perhaps surprisingly, that those who indicate that they have experienced trauma along the way feel safer in the camps. A potential explanation for this could be the relative perception of safety compared to their experiences en route; arrival at the camp may signify a relief after a traumatizing journey.
Some of our robustness checks also show positive effects of age, meaning that older refugees feel safer. Linked to our findings on safety and children, this may be related to a reduction in parenting responsibilities, as potential children grow up and become adults themselves. Another interpretation could be that the accumulation of life experience and coping strategies could provide older refugees with a more expansive ‘tool kit’ when assessing risk and safety.

Conclusion

While our data has some weaknesses, we find evidence that parental duties and associated stress impact women more than men. While feelings of safety are much lower for the women in our sample, much of this is explained by the number of children they are responsible for and travelling with. As such, a female refugee’s feeling of safety is contingent not only on their individual experience of displacement and fear for their own safety, but also responsibilities associated with their roles as parents or care-givers.

The REHEAL dataset has provided us with a snapshot of the situation in Greece in 2016, enabling us to better understand the experiences of previously under-researched populations. Future studies should take this snapshot and explore how the picture could be expanded further. Especially welcomed would be analyses mapping out experiences of safety along the refugee trajectories, to see how the background of the migrant and experiences en route shape time in transit or settlement.

Moreover, more research is needed on refugee families and associated responsibilities, to go beyond topics such as parent–child relations and explore how being a parent impacts the wellbeing and migration trajectory of refugees. This could both include more extensive studies on roles, responsibilities and stressors encountered by male and female refugees travelling together and enquiries into the experiences of male refugees who shoulder parenting responsibilities on their own. By gathering more detailed data on when and why different individuals in a family step over the ‘migration threshold’ and how they identify their role and duties in the family, the studies of family relations and care for kin could go beyond gendered tropes and further expand our understanding of trauma, parenting and care.

For now, the findings of this study should provide practitioners and policy makers with a renewed awareness of how gender should not simply be mainstreamed in refugee settlements, but that experiences of family responsibility, trauma and care should be seen as intersecting issues, affecting each other in different ways.

1. It could be argued that both our dependent variable and some independent variables should have been dichotomized. As the dichotomization creates a lot of ‘empty boxes’ and boxes with only positive or negative responses, the models break down when interactions are applied. When the models did converge, the
results supported what we present here. Ordinal regression models also returned very similar results.

2. Analysis was done using R version 3.5.1 (R Core Team 2018), and tables produced with Stargazer (Hlavac 2018).


