



# YOUTH NEWCOMERS' EDUCATIONAL RESISTANCE

## AUTHORS AFFILIATION RESEARCH PARTNER KEYWORDS

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Youth Newcomers, Education, Educational resistance, Refugee, Refugee education, Self-control, Canada, Personality Traits, Families, Belonging

## WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

**Objective:** To understand how personality traits, such as self-control, contribute to educational resistance among newcomer youth.

**Research Justification:** Refugee youth have the lowest educational attainment among all newcomers in Canada. Research on contributing factors for resistance to school among refugee youth has focused on their social class background and related cultural values. There is limited data available on how personal factors affect refugee youth resistance to school. This report intends to fill that gap.

**Practical Goal:** To develop a better understanding of refugee youth's involvement, attachment and resistance to school, and help stake-holders address settlement needs of refugee youth.

**Intended Primary Audience:** Policy makers, teachers and principals, guidance and career counsellors, psychology assessors, service providers.

## HOW WAS THE DATA OBTAINED

**Research Method:** The research was conducted via a telephone survey with 175 youth (14-24 years old) living in Windsor, Ontario and receiving services from the YMCA of Western Ontario's Windsor Learning Centre, Windsor-Essex Branch. The 423 youths identified by YMCA were sent invitation letters, resulting in 41.4% response rate and 175 complete responses (89 male, 86 female).

Most youth in the sample are Syrian (62.3%) followed by Iraqis (15%), from other Middle Eastern countries (8%), Africa (8%) and other continents (6.8%). The majority are government-sponsored refugees (66.9%), then convention (12.6%), and sponsored (11.4%) refugees.

To show the relationship between self-control and resistance to school, an index of low self-control and another for resistance to school was created.

## FINDINGS

The study found a strong relationship between low self-control and resistance to school, with children with low self-control being more likely to resist school.

Social class background and values, age, race, ethnic ancestry or refugee class entry did not make a difference in students' resistance to school. However, full-time employment and discrimination at school did increase educational resistance.

## EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND LANGUAGE

Of the respondents, 83% attended school at the time of the survey and 13.2% attended college or university. Among those in high school, 60% stated they plan to complete their high school education. 86% have a high school degree or less from outside Canada and 75.3% received a high school degree or less once in Canada. This suggests that most students are placed on a grade below what they already have before coming to Canada.

Over 60% stated they can speak English well or very well. 26.9% stated that they have worked for pay in Canada; 10.9% having worked full-time and 16% part-time.

## EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION

Sixteen percent of those surveyed stated they have experienced discrimination in Canada. Among those attending school, 16.3% reported being subject of discrimination. Most youth stated they have been discriminated against based on their language and accent followed by religion, ethnicity and culture.

## RESISTANCE OR ATTACHMENT TO SCHOOL

Most students (89%) stated they like school and 96% try hard to succeed at school. About 20% agreed they felt lonely at school, 13.9% skipped classes, 12.7% skipped school, and 11% got suspended.

Most students had made friends in Canada (93.7%), though all or most of these friends were also immigrants. There is also a high level of attachment to newcomers' own ethnocultural background and a sense of belonging to Canada. The youth were generally active in social groups with most involved in sports, community organizations and religious activities.

## FAMILY RELATIONS

Students overwhelmingly reported family members carefully plan everything, and that instructions and rules are transparent and clear in the family.

Most also felt understood by their parents, with only 8.6% saying they think their parents don't understand them all the time. Only 1.7% said family members have deep disagreements all the time, and 23% said they rarely want to run away from home.

There was a weak to non-existent relationship between family factors and low self-control and between family factors and resistance to school. This suggests refugee parents have little influence on their children's self-control or their resistance to school.

## LACK OF SELF-CONTROL

Most of the youth respondents reported a high level of self-control, with 80% stating they are usually careful, think before acting and don't take risks.

Some youths, however, reported impulsiveness, risk-taking, carelessness, restlessness and thoughtlessness. They stated they sometimes do risky things, say the first thing that comes into their mind, and lose their temper easily.

## CALL TO ACTION

Guidance and career counselors should be attentive to experiences of refugees, helping assess and place students in proper grade levels.

Teachers and school psychologist assessors should be trained to recognize students with low self-control. They should not, however, stigmatize these students by, for example, asking them to stay outside class, see the principal, and/or suspending them in front of other students. They should help them connect to peers who are proficient in the English language and have a high aptitude, as these peers could mentor them and help them build social connections.

Educational settings should provide therapeutic resources and environments that help combat refugees' cultural uprooting. Efforts should be made to minimize prejudice, differential treatment and discrimination at school through innovative and culturally sensitive classes.

Finally, Improvement in financial position of refugees will minimize the need for refugee children to skip classes for work in order to meet the family's economic needs.

## ABOUT CYRRC

The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) is a network of researchers, service providers, and government partners working together to produce and share research that facilitates the integration of young refugees and their families in Canada and beyond.

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