Youth Newcomers' Educational Resistance

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Executive Summary

Refugees who come to Canada have a relatively lower level of education when compared to the independent immigrants. Among all newcomers to Canada, refugee youth have the lowest educational attainment. Often, educational attainment of youth is explained by their social class background and related cultural values. Less attention has been paid to the importance of personality characteristics, such as self-control, and how these characteristics result in resistance in school.

Moreover, refugees' poverty-stricken living conditions in the host country as well as language and discrimination barriers augmented by the collapse of family order may result in children's maladaptive attitudes, self-control deficits, and personality problems, all of which could affect resistance to school and educational attainment of refugee youth. To date, there has been limited data to assess factors responsible for resistance to school among refugee youth. This report fills the gap by presenting results from a telephone survey with 175 youth between 14–24 years of age and living in Windsor, Ontario. Results point to the importance of self-control deficit and language and discrimination barriers for youth refugees' resistance to school.

Objectives and Overview

Every year, about 10,000 refugees start a new life in Canada. Between the years 2005-2014, Canada annually admitted just over 14,000 refugees. Among all individuals entering Canada in this period, 19.4 percent were government-assisted, 14.2 percent privately sponsored, 13.7 percent refugee dependent, and 52.5 percent landed and processed in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, CIC 2014). Colombians, Chinese, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and Haitians number highest among these refugees (CBC, 2015).

In 2015, the Liberal government announced that Canada would admit 25,000 refugees from war-torn Syria. By September 2018, 58,650 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada - 56.4 percent of which were government assisted, 34.9 percent privately sponsored, with the remaining being blended refugees. Only on two other occasions since WWII, has Canada helped resettle more than 25,000 refugees. An estimated 37,500 Hungarians were admitted in 1956-57 and another 69,000 individuals arrived from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos between 1975-80 (El-Assal, 2006). Many of these refugees had fled their own country due to sociopolitical upheavals, war, ethnic cleansing, violence, torture and rape, and have experienced significant traumatic physical and psychological suffering (Lamba and Krahn, 2003; Makarimba et al, 2013, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015).

Refugees who come to Canada have relatively lower level education than independent immigrants. For example, about 23 percent of the 114,665 refugees who arrived in Canada between January 2015 and September 2018 had no education, and another 54 percent of this group had high school education or less. These figures are about the same for the Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada between November 4th, 2015, and September 30th, 2018: 22.8 and 54.2 percent, respectively (IRCC, 2018). In comparison, only 31.9 percent of independent immigrants had high school degree or less, while 30.6 percent had some or completed post-secondary certificate or diploma and 37.2 percent had university degrees[1]. Among all newcomers to Canada, refugee youth have the lowest educational attainment (Shakya et al., 2012).

Once in Canada, refugee youth lack access to relevant educational information, have low levels of language proficiency, and experience discrimination in school. All of these factors can make school alienating and thus diminish aspirations, sense of belonging, involvement, and

[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/555224/number-of-landed-immigrants-in-canada-by-education-level/

attendance in school. These problems are further exacerbated because refugee parents often experience poverty, and their children often must take on many parental tasks. Refugee youth often become breadwinners when parents can't find a job, which tends to cut into their own study time and lower their educational aspirations and attainment (Shakya et al., 2012). These students may be inclined to combine education and employment in order to finance the family and their own educational expenses. They may orient themselves toward immediate income-producing jobs and reject schooling as a route to better future employment. Disruption of family order among refugees means that parents are often unable to provide for and monitor their children and ensure the development of culturally relevant characteristics important for educational success.

Refugee parents who themselves have suffered psychological distress may not be able to respond to the emotional and educational needs of their children. They may not be able to adequately invest in child rearing, such as monitoring, recognizing, rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). Some refugee parents may be involved in types of parenting techniques which could have negative effects on personality development and the educational attainment of their offspring (Beiser et al., 2015). Other refugee parents lack the appropriate cultural and social resources necessary to effectively help their offspring who are exposed to different culture at school and in the wider society (Yan, Lauer, and Chan, 2012). They may lack language skills and familiarity with the Canadian educational system and curricula and therefore may be unable to help and advocate for their children (Li et al., 2016; Francis and Yan, 2016). These problems are further exacerbated because of refugee youth's ethnocultural differences from the Canadian educational curricula and culture (Beiser et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2012; Shields and Lujan, 2018) and experiences of discrimination in school (Schroeter and James, 2015; Beiser, Puente-Duran, and Hou, 2015).

In general, poverty-stricken living conditions in the host country and language and discrimination barriers augmented by the collapse of family order, could result in maladaptive attitudes, self-control deficits, and personality problems, all of which could affect resistance to school and educational attainment of refugee youth. To date, there has been limited data to assess factors responsible for resistance to school among refugee youth. This report fills the gap by presenting results from a telephone survey with 175 youth who were 14–24 years of age and lived in Windsor, Ontario.

The survey focussed on assessing students' level of self-control, parent-child relationship, experience of discrimination, various forms of resistance or attachment to school and employment. The information reported here will help develop a better understanding of refugee youth's involvement, attachment and resistance to school and help stake-holders address settlement and success of refugees. Specifically, the results will help to:

- Better understand refugee youth's educational experiences
- Provide information on areas of schooling that need to be improved
- Prepare for arrival of future refugee youth

Methodology

The data for this study is based on a sample of administrative information collected by the YMCA of Western Ontario, Windsor-Essex Branch. Windsor is a culturally diverse city and is one of the original cities in Ontario that the federal government designated for the Resettlement Assistance Program. Statistics Canada (2011) reports that 22.3% of Windsor's population are immigrants and refugees. This figure is slightly higher than the national average, which is 20.6%.

The YMCA of Western Ontario's Newcomer Programs receives funding from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), formerly known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada, to provide assistance to eligible newcomers, enabling them to make decisions about their settlement, enhancing their understanding of life in Canada, and facilitating their social, cultural, economic, and political integration into Canadian society. This process begins with a Needs Assessment and Referral model that focuses on language, orientation, community connections, and employment, with the goal of empowering newcomers to take a more active role in planning their own settlement. The YMCA regularly collects information and outcome measures identified in the iCARE model and reports on and contextualizes this information on a regular basis to IRCC.

Based on the existing database, the YMCA provided the addresses and telephone numbers of 520 youths who were 14–24 years of age and who attended this service provider organization from April 1, 2013, to April 1, 2017. After ethics approval, a letter of invitation was sent to these newcomers. Furthermore, the youth in the YMCA list were called by telephone between December 2017 to March 2018, which resulted in 423 contacts, 97 wrong numbers, and 175 complete responses. Accordingly, the effective response rate was 41.4 percent. Present analyses are based on 175 newcomer students, 146 of which attended school at the time of the survey.

Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-demographic Characteristics

The average age of youth in the sample is about 19, 51 percent are males, and 14 percent are married. Most youth in this sample are Syrian (62.3%), Iraqis (15%) and the remaining are from other Middle Eastern countries (8%), Africa (8%) and other continents (6.8). The overwhelming majority are government sponsored refugees (66.9%), followed by convention (12.6%), and sponsored (11.4%) refugees (Figure 1). Just over 20 percent of youth have refugee camp experience (Table 1).

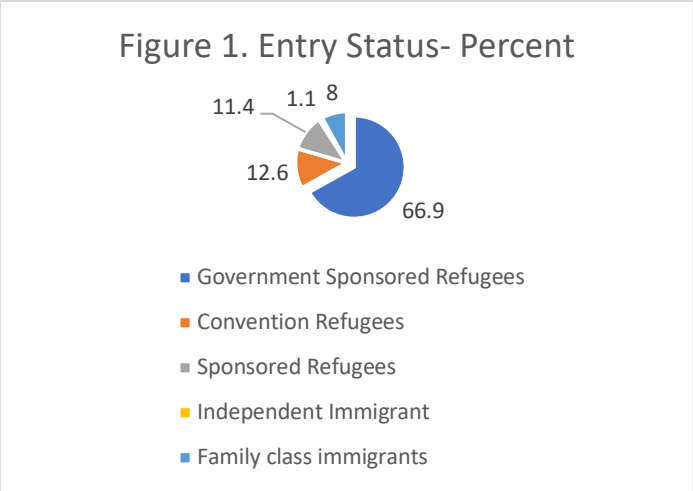
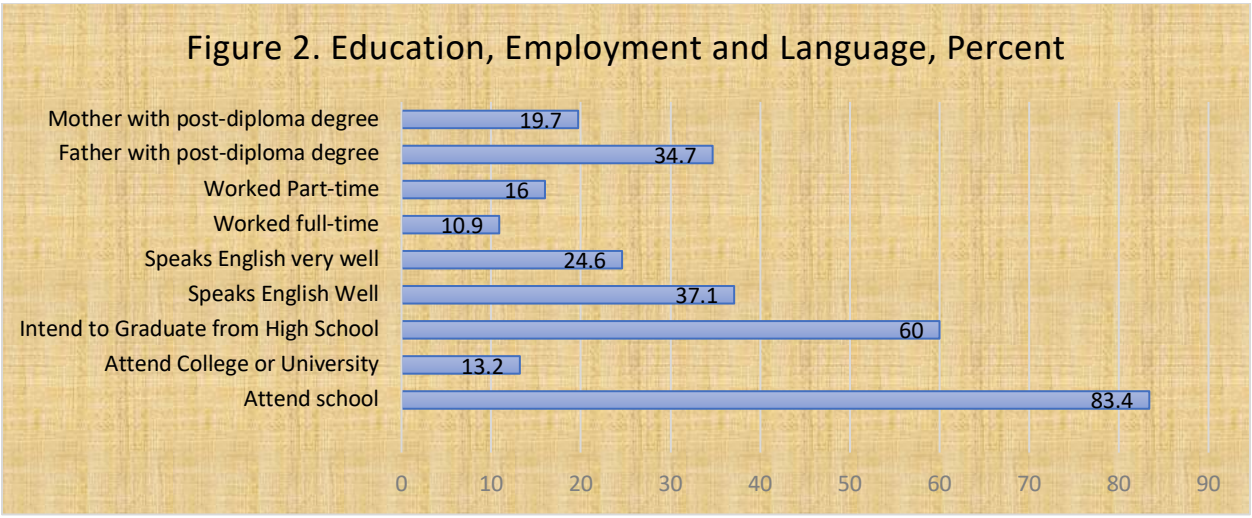


Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	N	%
Male	89	50.9
Female	86	49.1
Age 15-19	97	55.4
Age 20-24	78	44.6
Syria	109	62.3
Iraq	26	14.9
Other Origins	40	22.9
Refugee Camp Experience	36	20.6
Married	24	14

Education, Employment and Language

Eighty-three percent of the students in the sample were attending school at the time of the survey and another 13.2% were attending college or university. Among those in high school 60% stated that they plan to complete their high school education. Just about 61.7% stated that they can speak English well or very well. 59.9% stated that they aim to graduate from high school while only 2.8% stated that they wish to go to university. 34.7% of their fathers and 19.7% of their mothers had an education above high school degree. 26.9% stated that they have worked for pay since in Canada, 10.9% stated that they worked full-time and 16% part-time. Among those attending school, these figures were 23.1%, 8.8%, and 14.4%, respectively. Just over 13% said that their parents have a post-diploma or less education (Figure 2).



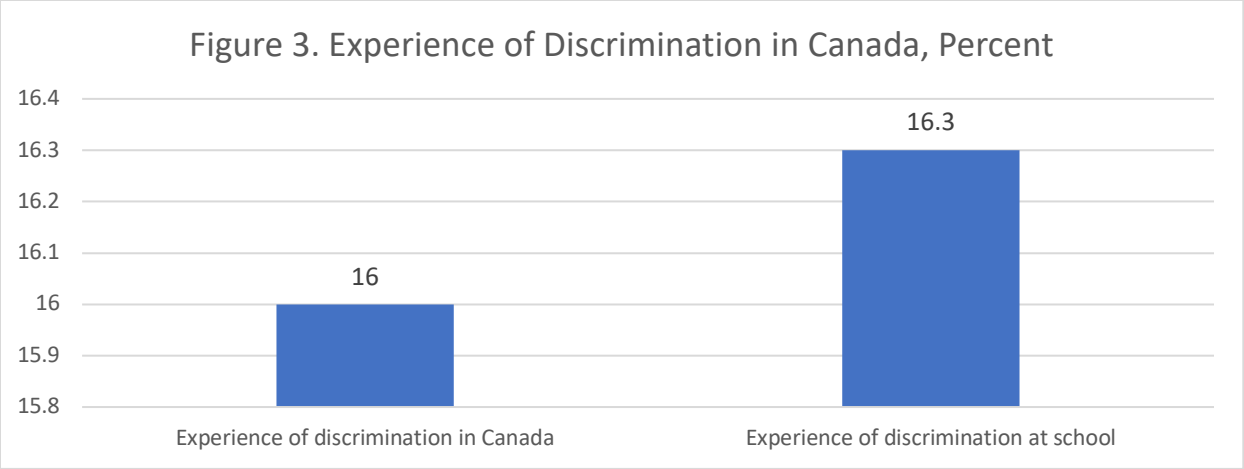
Eighty-eight percent of students stated that they have a high school degree or less from a country outside Canada, 10.3% of which have completed their high school degree before coming to Canada. On the other hand, 75.3% stated that they received a high school degree or less when in Canada, 2.3% of which have completed their high school degree (Table 2). These figures suggest that most students are placed on a grade below what they have already acquired.

Table 2. Highest level of education

	Outside Canada		In Canada	
	N	%	N	%
No formal education	3	1.7	10	5.7
Some elementary or elementary school completed	35	20.1	5	2.9
Some high school	100	57.5	112	64.4
High school graduation	18	10.3	4	2.3
Some trade school or apprenticeship training	2	1.1	2	1.2
Some college (or Cégep)	1	0.6	12	6.9
College/Cégep diploma or certificate	4	2.3	1	0.6
University	7	4	7	4
Degree in dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine, optometry, law or theology	1	0.6	9	5.2
Don't know/ Refused	3	1.7	12	6.9

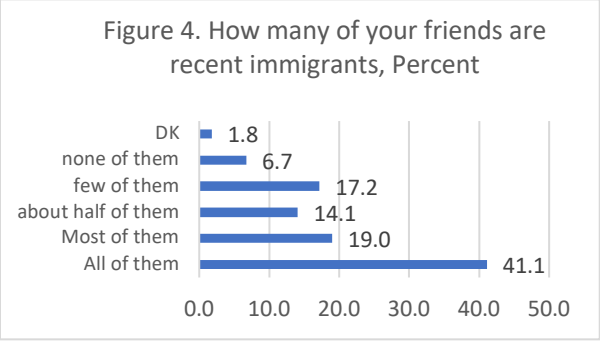
Discrimination at School

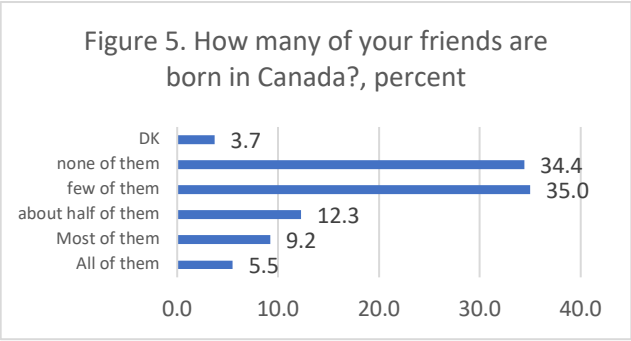
Sixteen percent of the youth stated that they have experienced discrimination in Canada, while among those attending school 16.3% stated that they have been the subject of discrimination (Figure 3). Most youth stated that they have been discriminated against based on their language and accent followed by religion, ethnicity and culture.



Friendship Network

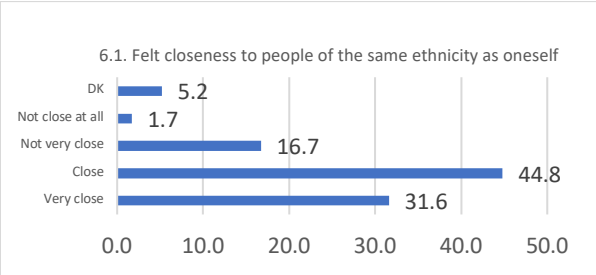
Majority of youth reported having made friends while in Canada (93.7%), though all or most of them were, themselves, immigrants and a very small percentage were born in Canada (Figures 4 and 5).

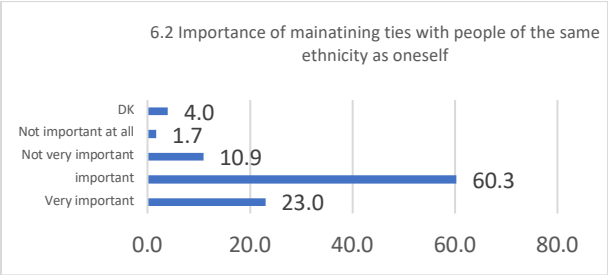


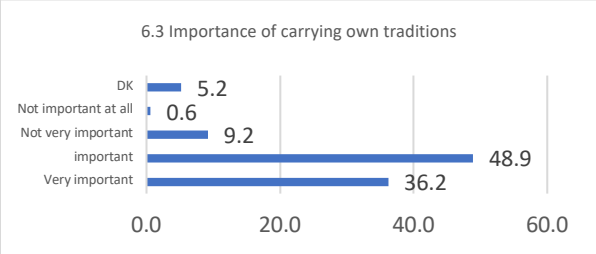


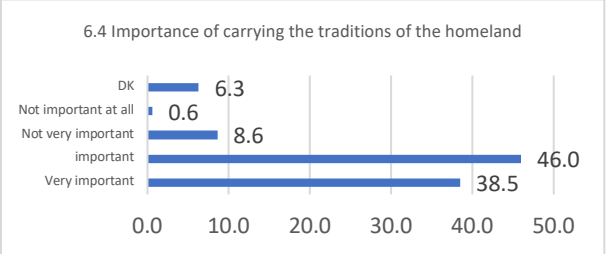
Attachment and Belonging

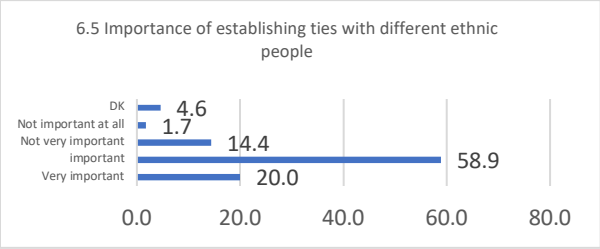
Over 70% of students stated that they feel close or very close to people of the same ethnic and cultural groups as themselves and over 80% stated that it is important or very important to maintain ties with people of the same ethnic and cultural groups as themselves. Similarly, about 80% stated that it is important or very important to carry on the values and traditions of their own ethnic and cultural background and/or homeland. At the same time, about 80% stated that it is important or very important to establish ties with people in Canada who are not from the same ethnic and cultural groups, and to practice the values and traditions of people in Canada. Just over 90% stated that if they had a choice, they would choose to come to Canada again. These high level of attachment among the students to their own values and traditions and to Canadian values and traditions points to the strong ethos of multiculturalism among these newcomers; a high level of attachment to their own tradition and to that of Canada. (Figure 6). This is further supported by their sense of belonging to Canada and their own ethnocultural background where over 70% stated that they have a strong or a very strong sense of belonging to Canada and to their own ethnocultural groups. As might be expected, the strongest sense of belonging is stated to be for their own family (Figure 7).











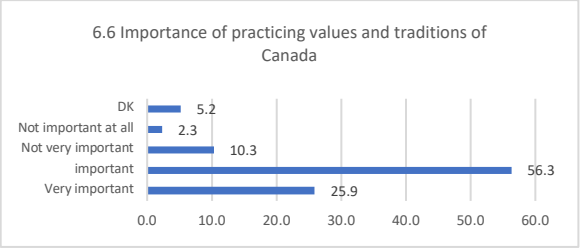
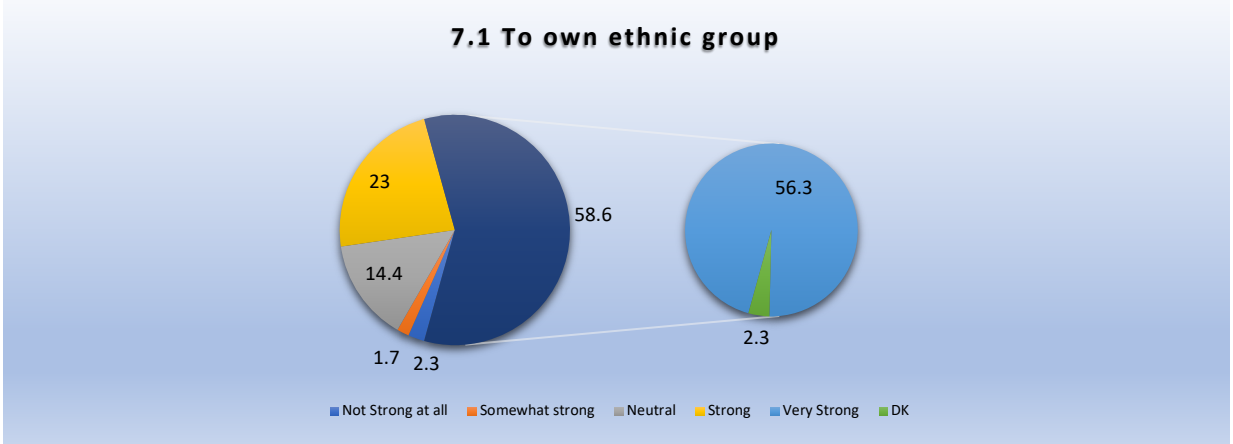
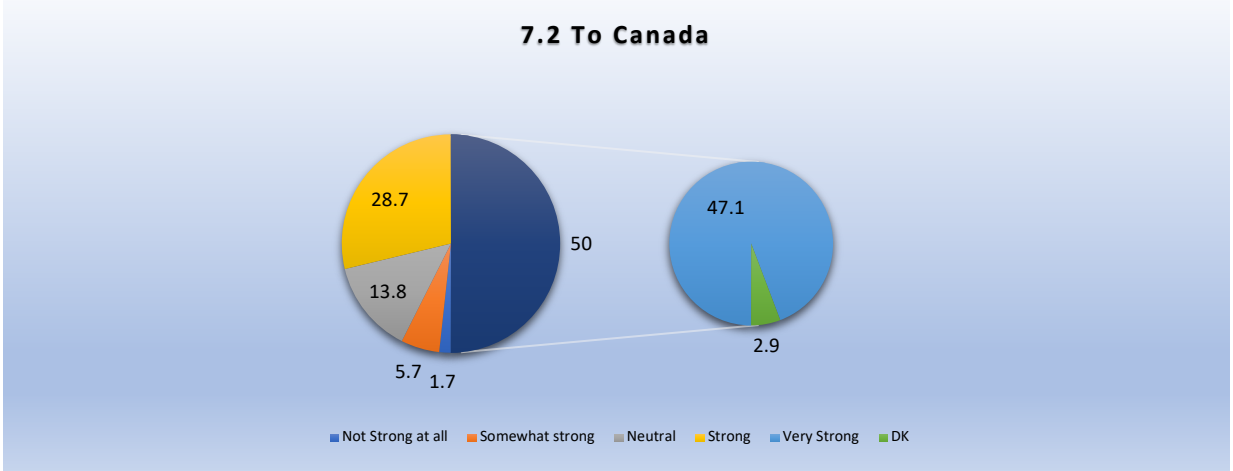
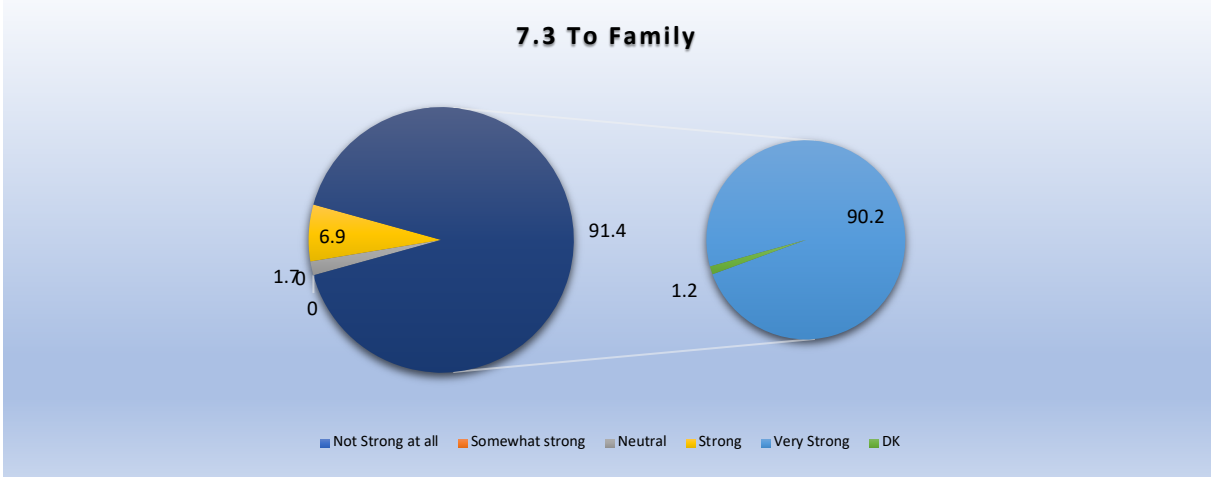


Figure 6. Attachments to Own and Canadian Traditions and Values

Figure 7. Strength of Sense of Belonging



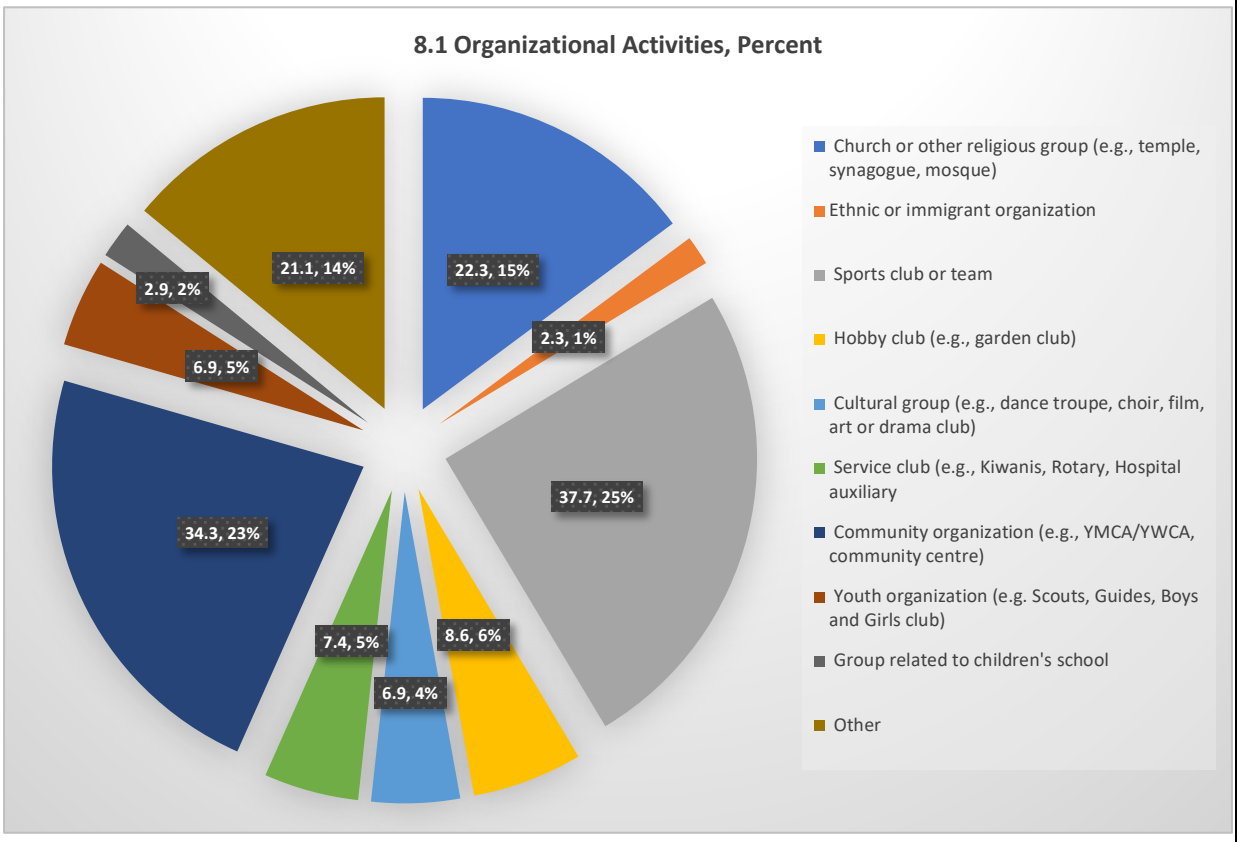


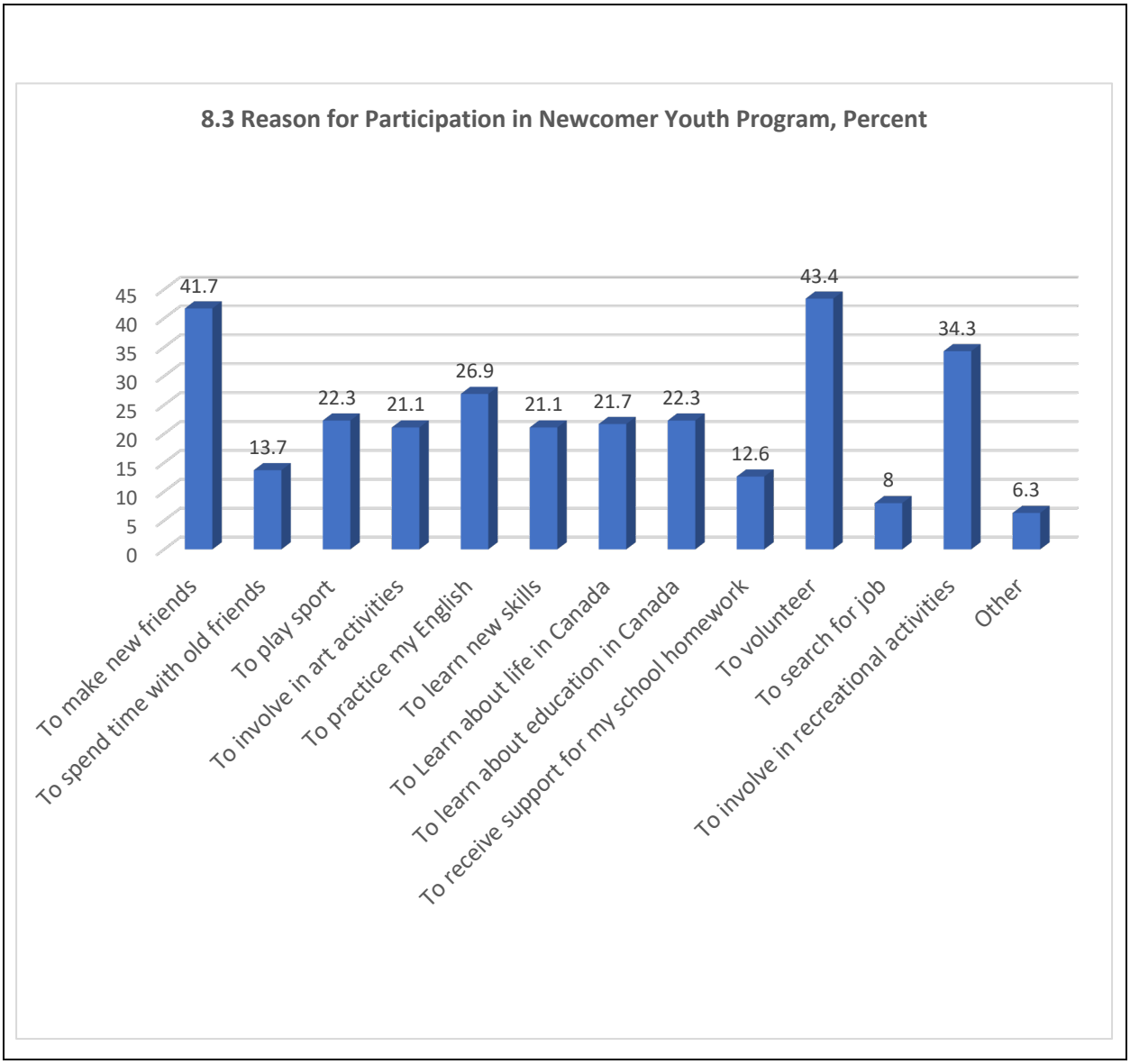


Social Activities

Youth in this study were generally active in groups or organizations. Most were involved in sport activities and community organizations, followed by religious activities. However, close to half did not participate in the Youth Newcomer Programs. Among those who were participants in the Youth Newcomer Programs, the majority were interested in volunteering or making new friends or spending time with friends. The fourth most important reason for participating in Youth Newcomer Programs was to "practice English." Others were interested in learning about life in Canada, new skills, and to play sports (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Social Activities

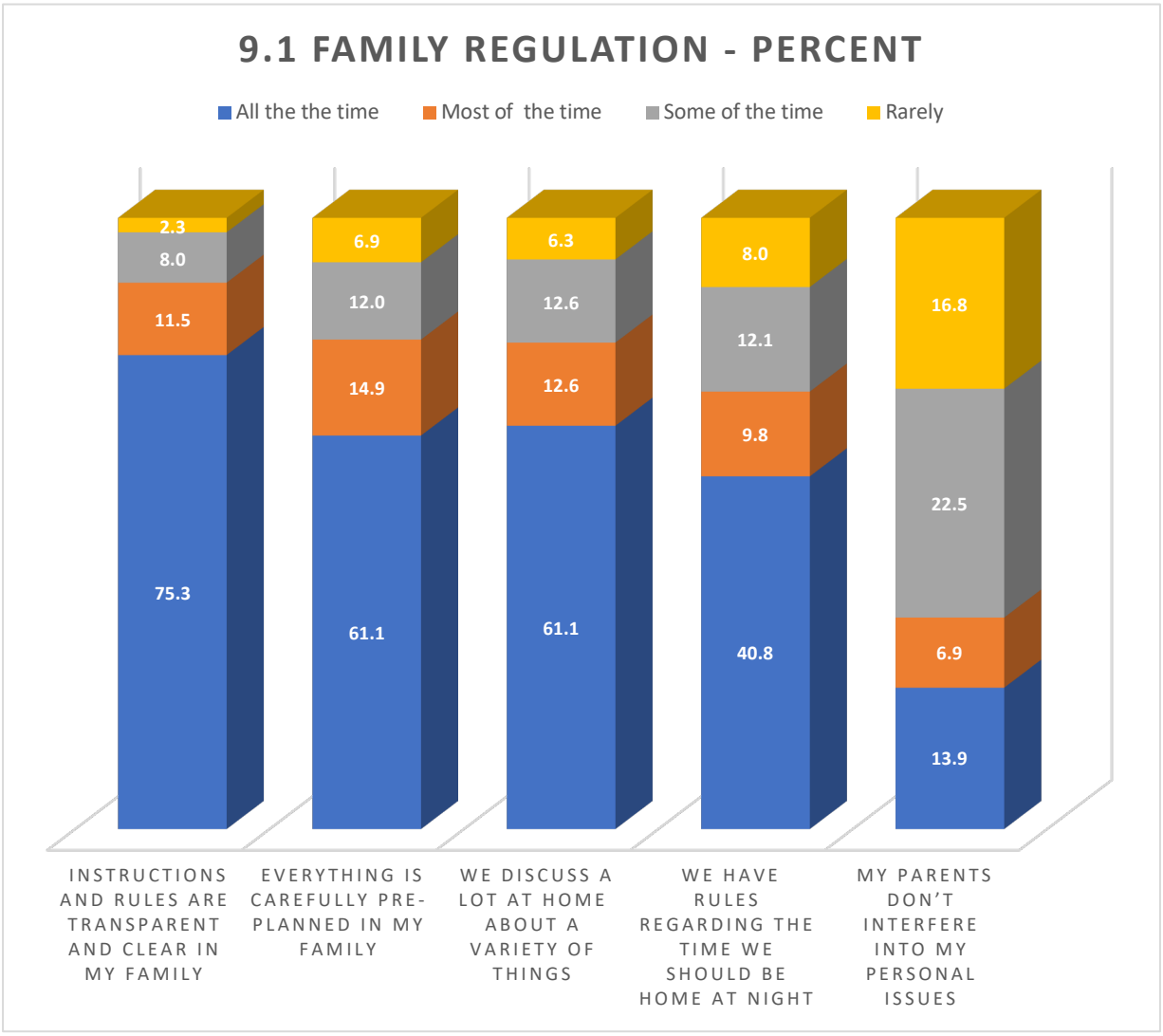


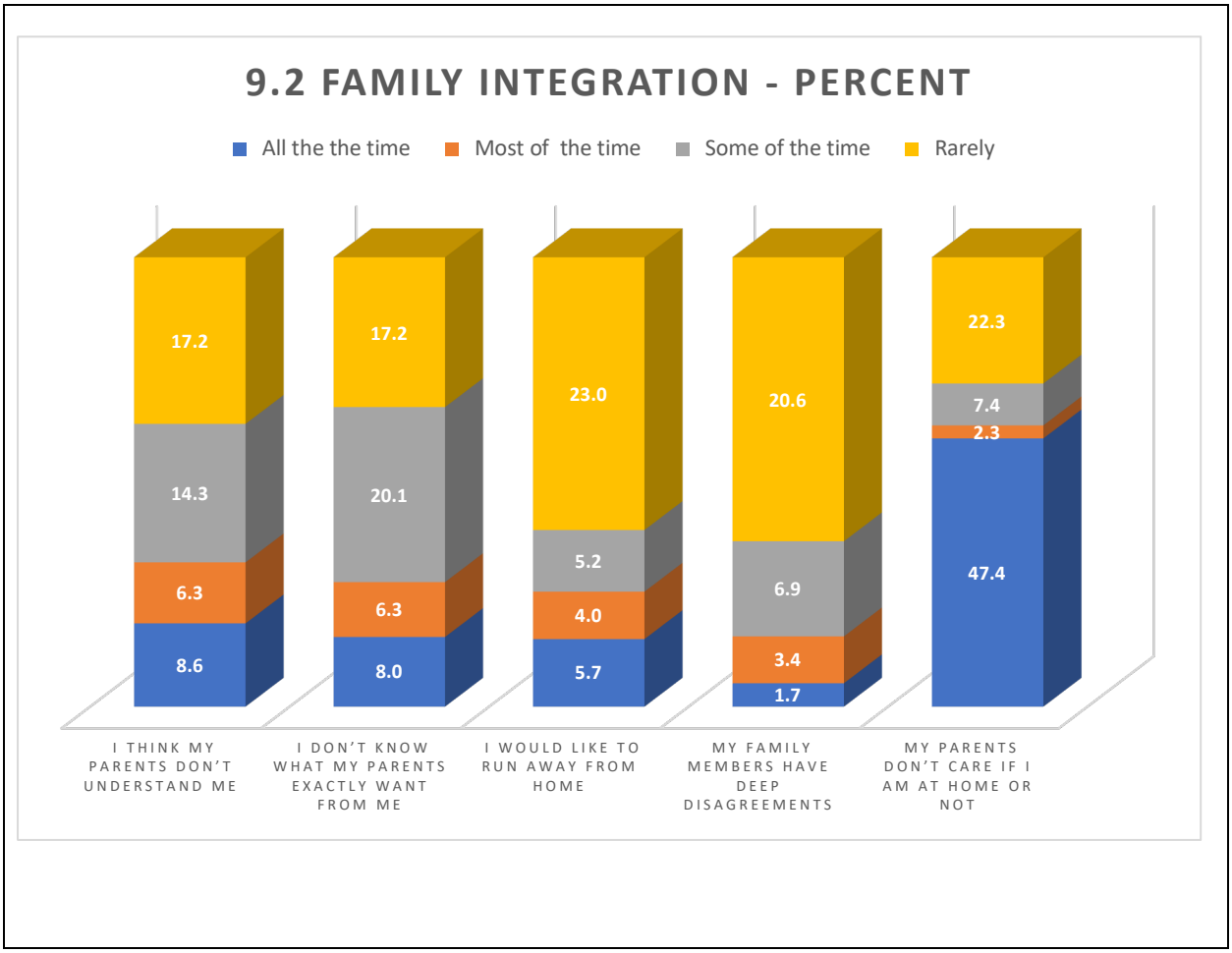


Family Relations

Generally, there is a high level of family integration and regulation between parents and youth in this sample. Students overwhelmingly expressed that family members carefully plan everything, discuss and respect rules (regulated family relations). However, some youth believe that their parents sometimes disagree with each other, don't care about them, to the extent that a small percentage of youth wish to run away from home (unintegrated family; Figure 9).

Figure 9. Family Relations





Self-control

Some youth displayed impulsiveness, risk-taking, carelessness, restlessness and thoughtlessness. They stated that they sometimes do risky things, say the first thing comes into their mind, and lose their temper easily. Nevertheless, most displayed a high level of self-control. For example, over 80% stated that they are usually careful, are not reckless, think before acting, don't act dangerous, and don't take risks (Figure 10).

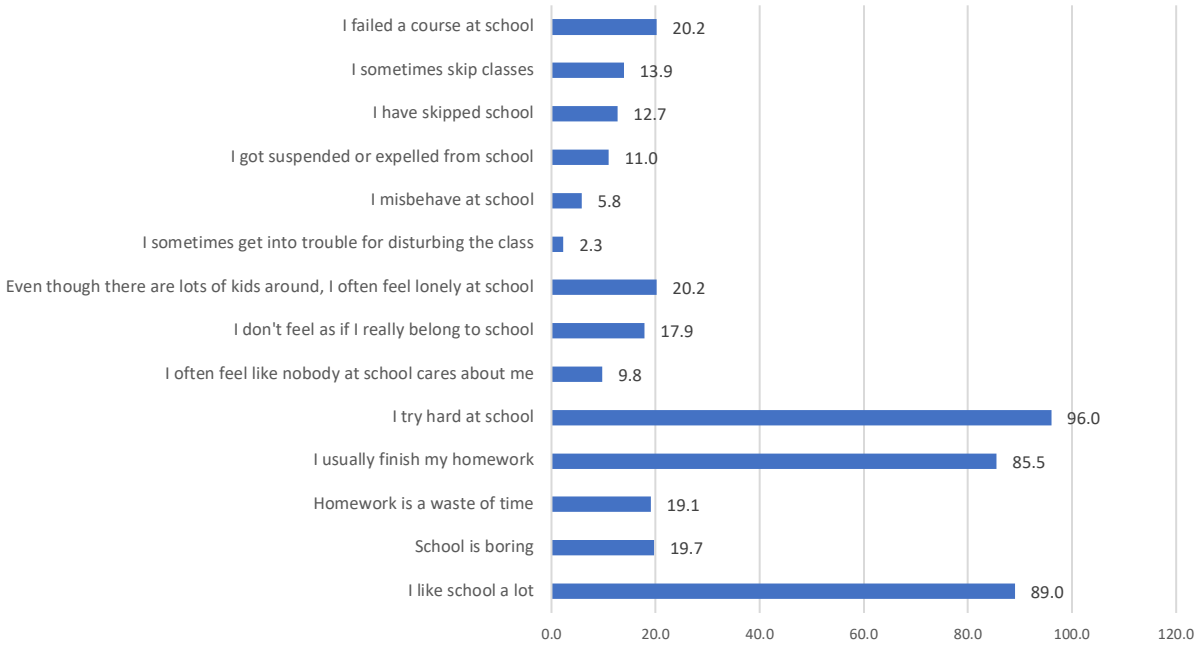
Resistance to School

Most students like school (89%). They do their homework (85.5%), see school and homework as positive, and try hard to succeed at school (96%). Nevertheless, some students feel lonely at school

(20.2%), failed a course (20.2%), skipped classes (13.9%), skipped school (12.7%) and got suspended (11%; Figure 11).

Figure 10. Self-control - Percent Agree

Figure 11. Resistance to School - Percent Agree



Family Regulation, Family Integration and Resistance to School

The relationship between indices of family regulation[2] and family integration[3] with resistance to school is very weak or non-existent. Similarly, family integration and regulation are not associated with low self-control (Figure 12). These findings suggest that refugee parents have little influence on their children's self-control development or their resistance to school. These findings suggest that families are not the source of low self-control or resistance to school.

Low Self-control and Resistance to School

In order to show the relationship between self-control and resistance to school an index of low self-control and another for resistance to school is created. The average score for resistance to school is 6.2 (it ranges from 1 to 15)[4], and for low self-control it is 11.2 (it ranges from 1 to 19)[5]. Resistance to school was shown to be strongly related to low self-control (Figure 13). The average level of resistance to school by those with high self-control is 5.50 when compared to 6.77 for those with low self-control. In addition, full-time employment and experience of discrimination

[2] Family regulation is based on four four-point Likert-scale questions from all of the time to rarely: Everything is carefully pre-planned in my family, We discuss a lot at home about a variety of things, Instructions and rules are transparent and clear in my family, We have rules regarding the time we should be home at night (higher scores higher regulation).

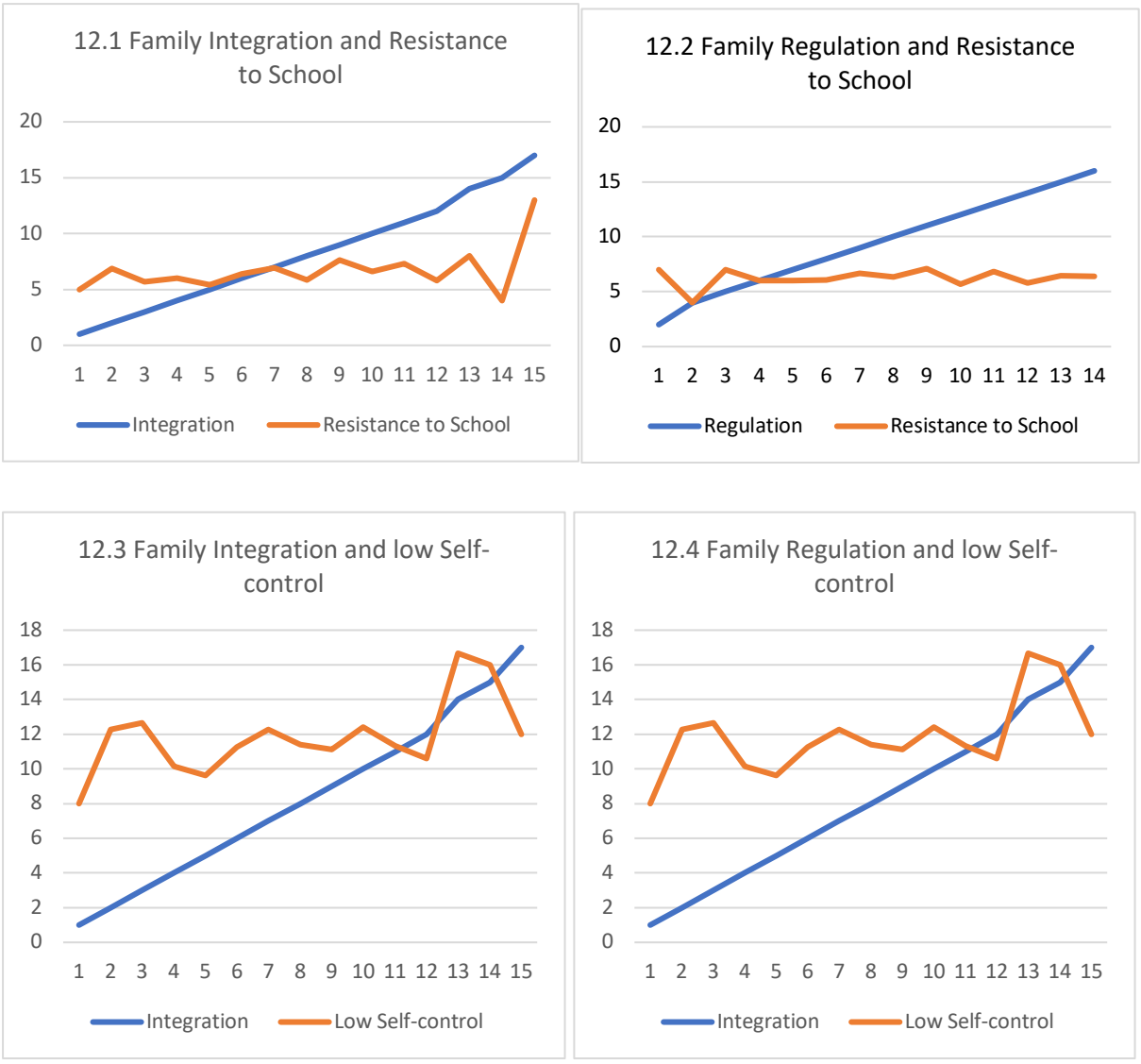
[3] Family integration is based on four four-point Likert-scale questions from all of the time to rarely:I would like to run away from home, I think my parents don't understand me, I don't know what my parents exactly want from me, My family members have deep disagreements, My parents don't care if I am at home or not (higher scores more regulation.

[4] Measure of resistance to school is based on four constructs, each measured by agree and disagree responses to several statements. These include: *estrangement* (I like school a lot, school is boring, homework is a waste of time), *Misbehaviour* (I sometimes get into trouble for disturbing class, I misbehave at school, I failed a course at school, I usually finish my homework), *not belonging* (I try hard at school, I often feel like nobody at school cares about me, I don't feel as if I belong to school, even though there are lots of kids around, I often feel lonely at school), and *truancy* (I got suspended or expelled from school, I have skipped school, I have skipped classes).

[5] Measure of self-control is based on five constructs, each measured by agree and disagree responses to several statements. These include: *impulsiveness* (I will try almost anything regardless of consequences, often, when I am angry at people, I feel more like hurting them than talking to them about why I am angry, when I have a serious disagreement with someone, it's usually hard for me to talk about it without getting upset, I usually say the first things that come into my mind), *thoughtlessness* (I am careful in almost everything I do, I have a well-considered reason for almost everything I undertake, many times, I act without thinking), *carelessness* (I often behave in a reckless manner, I generally make careful plans, At times, I am rather careless), *risk-taking* (I often take risks without stopping to think about the results, sometimes, I will take a risk just for the fun of it, I sometimes take unnecessary chances), and *restlessness* (I am the type to be bored one minute and excited about something the next, I often leave jobs unfinished, I am often somewhat restless).

also increases resistance to school. There is little difference in resistance to school by gender, age, refugee entry class or ethnic ancestry (Figure14).

Figure 12. Family Regulation, Family Integration and Resistance to School



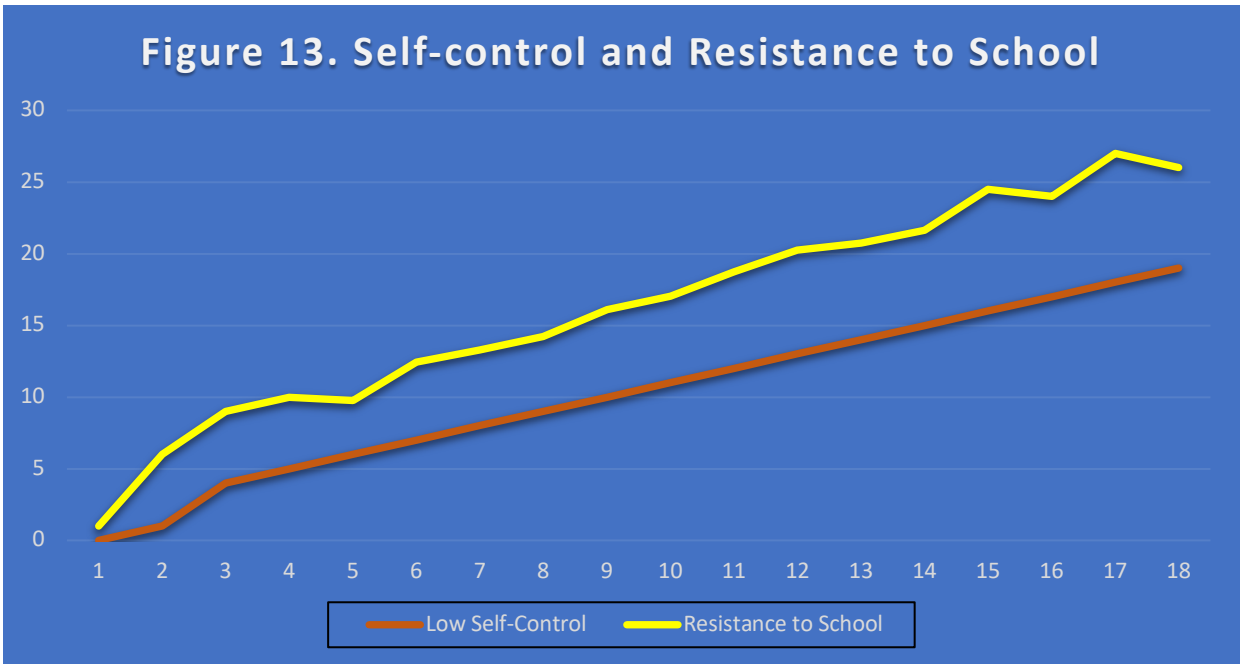


Figure 13. Self-control and Resistance to School
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18
Low Self-Control
Resistance to School

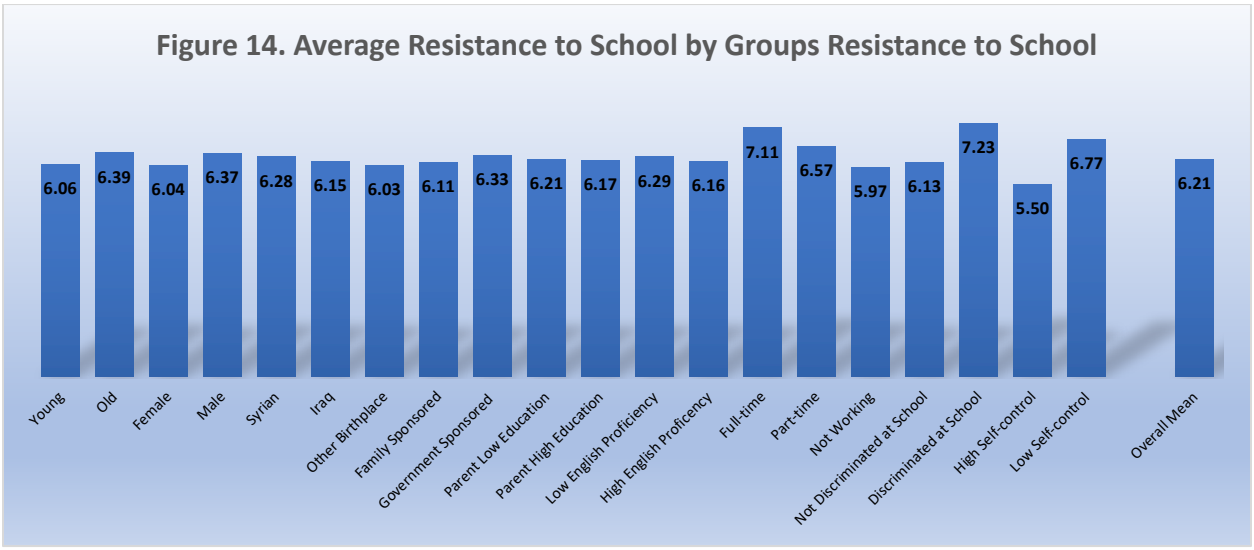


Figure 14. Average Resistance to School by Groups Resistance to School
6.06
6.39
6.04
6.37
6.28
6.15
6.03
6.11
6.33
6.21
6.17
6.29
6.16
7.11
6.57
5.97
6.13
7.23
5.50
6.77
6.21
Young
Old
Female
Male
Syrian
Iraq
Other Birthplace
Family Sponsored
Government Sponsored
Parent Low Education
Parent High Education
Low English Proficiency
High English Proficency
Full-time
Part-time
Not Working
Not Discriminated at School
Discriminated at School
High Self-control
Low Self-control
Overall Mean

Policies

Results of this study may point to the failure of various policy initiatives that have not addressed psychological predispositions arising from being refugees and/or newcomers. Guidance and career councillors need to be attentive to experiences of refugees, helping assess and place students in proper grade levels. Teachers and school psychologist assessors need to 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, telling them to see the principal, and/or suspending them in front of other students. Here, restorative justice demands finding appropriate mechanisms for dealing with such students through one-to-one private and personal communication, contact, mentoring, and overall assistance with managing the school environment, building confidence, and developing attachment. Moreover, teachers and assessors should help these students connect to students 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. In addition, efforts should be made to minimize prejudice, differential treatment and discrimination at school through innovative and culturally sensitive classes. Finally, given the near poverty situation of many refugee parents, their children are forced to skip classes and school to work in order to meet the family's economic needs. As such, improvement in financial position of refugees will minimize school truancy of refugee youth.

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