

Youth with Refugee Experience in Nova Scotia

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OVERVIEW: This study looked at the resettlement challenges faced by youths with refugee experience (YRE) in rural and urban Nova Scotia. Specifically, the study looked at youths' access to services and their experiences in school and entering the workforce.

OBJECTIVE: To understand youth's resettlement experiences, their access to services in urban and rural areas, and how they navigate employment opportunities; and to project the voices of YRE to inform policies and programs that better meet their needs.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Data from IRCC shows that government assisted refugees (GARs) in Nova Scotia are exclusively resettled in Halifax, while privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) are resettled around the province, raising questions about their access to services and employment opportunities. Research indicates YRE face many obstacles when attempting to enter the workforce. This study expands our understanding of YRE's school-to-work transition to more effectively support YRE's engagement with their communities.

HOW THE DATA WERE OBTAINED

The research team conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 21 youth with refugee experience (YRE). The participants were 18 to 25 years old and had migrated to Nova Scotia between January 1st, 2013, and December 31st, 2019. Of the participants, 12 were GARs, 7 were PSRs, and 2 had blended sponsorship; 18 resided in Halifax and 3 outside of Halifax; and 13 identified as female and 8 as male. The interview and focus group questions were open-ended and directed by participants' needs and comfort with sharing their experiences. The research team also employed a peer advisor who provided input throughout the project based on her experiences as a refugee and who participated in research dissemination activities.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

The study highlighted several resettlement challenges youth with refugee experience face:

- Youth described a lack of pre-immigration knowledge about Canada.
- Youth felt that they were often forced into low-skilled, low-paying and/or physically demanding jobs.
- Youth experienced mental and physical health challenges often brought on by low paying, high demanding jobs and supporting their parents and siblings.
- There was an inadequacy of resettlement services in rural areas, including employment services and support for youth's mental and physical health.
- In school, YRE require more options for enrolling in English learning courses, recognition of their prior educational experience, recognition of their English-language abilities, validation of their ability to take higher-level courses and greater support addressing racism within the school system.
- Youth suggested workshops for newcomer families to familiarise them with workplace norms and culture and Canadian systems for daily tasks (e.g., taking the bus and buying groceries) and essential tasks (e.g., networking and applying for jobs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide orientation workshops to newcomer families during the pre-migration or initial settlement process on Canadian culture and systems.
- Employment programs need to provide more opportunities for YRE to acquire Canadian work experience, such as volunteer or paid work opportunities, and options to work with more diverse employers.
- Settlement supports for YRE need to be accessible for youth in rural areas. Specifically employment services and mental and physical health supports need to be improved in rural areas.
- Schools need to recognize that YRE have different needs and different strengths. Their prior educational and language experiences should be recognized, and they should be supported to pursue higher-level classes and post-secondary education.
- Policies to address racism within the school system need to be implemented.



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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.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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