

School Interrupted: Refugee Youth in Nova Scotia



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Research Questions

1. In Halifax what are refugee youths' experiences with interrupted schooling?
 2. What are their educational aspirations for advancing in their post-secondary trajectory?
 3. What is required to support youth to advance their formal education?

Research Context

- Newcomers & refugees are increasingly settling in Nova Scotia in mid-size cities, such as Halifax, as well as outer suburban areas
 - Refugees 15 years old and older are 4X more likely than economic immigrants to have had less than 9 years of schooling
 - Immigrant-origin children are the fastest growing sector of the youth population in diverse countries, including in Canada

Methodology



- A qualitative approach
 - One-to-one interviews using Microsoft Teams with refugee youth who migrated to Canada mostly as government assisted refugees, and reside in Halifax
 - Interpretation in Spanish and Arabic was provided when necessary

Theoretical Framework: Transnationalism

- Migrants engage in transnational processes of creating social fields that link their countries of origin and their countries of settlement (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992).
 - These social fields structure everyday practices and are central to our transnational analysis. A transnational perspective "attempts to capture the characteristics of transmigrant experiences by examining the complexity of these social fields and the social dimensions of globalisation" (Brigham et al, 2018, p.2).

Participant Information



- 21 female-identified and 3 male-identified
 - From 16 to 26 years old
 - 2 are enrolled as WUSC students
 - 4 completed high school
 - 1 completed primary school
 - 16 are currently in high school

- Participants experienced interrupted schooling from 2 months to not having the opportunity to attend school at all until they arrived in Canada
 - 1 participant has still had no opportunity to attend school
 - Participants had been in Canada from 15 days to 10 years



Findings

The major themes in the study include: 1. Language, 2. Friendships, 3. Gender, 4. Sense of belonging, 5. Aspirations and 6. Resilience.

1. Language is a large barrier to participants being able to access school, post-secondary education, work and/or social spaces. Participants also expressed a lack of access to quality English language learning opportunities.

2. Friendships are a major aspect of the lives of youth. When youth are able to form relationships with others they create their own community where they get support.

3. Gendered differences include when women/girls face additional challenges due to cultural expectations (such as housework, parental responsibility) and pregnancy.

4. Many participants felt they did not belong in their new contexts including schools due to how they felt their differences were perceived by others (eg. their race or culture).

5. Participants expressed high aspirations for higher education and careers, many dreaming of becoming doctors, nurses, and engineers.
6. Many participants demonstrated resilience through persistence in their school, and social contexts.

Recommendations

- Free and accessible English language learning opportunities must be provided in various contexts, formally and informally
 - Pre-service teachers must learn about refugee youth's diverse experiences & needs
 - Teachers require support to address the needs of refugee youth (e.g. EAL, counselling)
 - Educators must recognize refugee youth's transnational identities and their strengths and assets
 - Diversify school curriculum including socio-politically relevant pedagogy (SPRP)
 - Mentorship and work placements are necessary to help youth prepare to enter the labour force
 - Gender differences must be considered in educational policy
 - A trauma informed approach is required in educational contexts
 - Academic and financial supports are required
 - Social spaces/opportunities for peer interaction must be provided for youth inside and outside of schools