

Support for Refugee Families in Waterloo Region in Managing Conflict and Addressing Domestic Violence: Towards an Interculturally Integrated Approach to Family Conflict Management

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OVERVIEW: This study sought to understand how refugee families in the Waterloo Region are supported to manage family conflicts and prevent domestic violence in culturally appropriate ways.

OBJECTIVE: To understand the gaps in support for families with refugee experience in the Waterloo Region when dealing with family conflict, and to propose an approach to addressing family conflict and domestic violence in culturally appropriate ways.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Families with refugee experience face multiple pre-, during, and post-migratory stressors which can generate family conflicts that then potentially lead to domestic violence. Families need support to manage family conflict and prevent domestic violence. To be effective, these supports should be culturally appropriate.

HOW THE DATA WAS OBTAINED

The research team conducted online focus group discussions and individual interviews with 20 participants. Participants included those who have worked with refugee families, have lived experience as a refugee, or have sponsored refugee families. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity was applied as an analytical framework to the interview data. The research team was supported by a research advisory committee who provided a community perspective and helped share the findings.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

All participants confirmed that domestic violence is an existing problem in the Waterloo Region. The most common forms of violence in families with refugee experience are financial, psychological, emotional, physical, and sexual.

Underlying factors of family conflict and domestic violence include:

- › Trauma incurred throughout forced migration.
- › Pressures of adaptation and cultural integration or acculturation.
- › Cultural adjustment factors that cause intergenerational conflict.
- › Cultural and religious beliefs that consider certain violent practices acceptable (e.g., corporal punishment).
- › Different beliefs and understandings around gender roles, family roles, and parenting.
- › Financial stress and family discord related to the use of limited resources and supporting extended families back home.
- › Cultural misunderstanding of refugee sponsors can create tensions and lead to conflicts within the family.

Although there are many services that provide support to families with refugee experience in the Waterloo Region, study participants identified gaps in managing family conflict and domestic violence in a culturally appropriate way. These gaps result from:

- › Limited understanding of the cultural norms and practices of refugee families in managing family conflicts.
- › Insufficient educational resources, financial resources and training for stakeholders involved in supporting refugee families to manage conflict or respond to domestic violence.
- › In most cases, Western approaches which involve the police and court proceedings are found to be culturally inappropriate for helping refugee families address the problem.

An interculturally integrated approach to family conflict management should take into account the socio-cultural and contextual realities of refugee families while:

- › Strengthening families' capacities to manage conflict in a non-violent and culturally appropriate manner.
- › Helping refugee families to feel respected and to increase their sense of belonging to their host community without losing their cultural identity.
- › Respecting the faith and spirituality of refugee families that enable them to maintain and live their cultural values.
- › Helping refugee families overcome trauma and build resilience.
- › Seeking to understand and respond to the unique challenges and needs of families that can cause or intensify family conflict.

- Increasing the awareness of all stakeholders involved in the integration of refugee families on how violence affects family well-being, how to identify early signs and risk factors of domestic violence within the family, and how to intervene in a way that respects and maintains trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Relevant institutions should include domestic violence prevention in the cultural orientation training provided to newly arrived refugee families and to sponsoring groups preparing to host refugee families.
- Collaborative efforts to supporting refugee families managing conflict should be encouraged by bringing together different stakeholders and engaging in a multidisciplinary approach.
- Increase funding for support services for refugee families as they integrate into Canadian society.
- Efforts to address domestic violence in refugee families should equally consider and be compassionate towards men and women.
- Organizations serving refugee families should create a cultural navigator position to help strengthen the cultural appropriateness of supports for families.

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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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