Fostering the development of immigrant youth leaders in our communities

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Metropolis 2011
Vancouver, BC
March 24, 2011

Acknowledgements

- Research participants and community partners
- Research assistants
- Prairie Metropolis Centre
- Metropolis Project

Overview

- Background
- Research objectives
- Data collection
- Results
- Limitations
- Future research

Research objectives

To identify factors that

- affect the settlement experiences of newcomer youth and
- facilitate their successful integration.

Research questions

- 1. What are the backgrounds and characteristics of immigrant youth who have become youth leaders or role models in their communities?
- 2. What challenges have they faced in their resettlement process?
- 3. What factors have served to support them and/or to reduce the impact of negative influences in their lives?
- 4. What recommendations do participants have for improving existing services and/or developing new programs to address the needs of newcomer youth?

Recruitment

- immigrants or refugees;
- arrived in Edmonton between the ages of 12 and 20;
- currently aged 14-30 years;
- identified as youth leaders/role models in their community
- recommended by community partners

Participant backgrounds

- 5 participants (3 males, 2 females) representing the following countries:

  Colombia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Liberia, Rwanda
- Mean age: 20.6y (range: 19-22y)
- Mean length of residence: 4.7 years (range: 4y-5y)

Interviews

- 60-90-minute audio-taped interviews
- Content:

Arrival	Employment
Family	Support
Housing	Stress
School	Discrimination/racism
Friends	Criminal involvement
Gang involvement	Advice
Programs/services	Future hopes

Challenges

- culture shock
- cold weather
- lack of English, isolation
- unfamiliar school system
- financial problems
- perceived racism, stereotyping

Culture shock

- *When I arrived it was really hard for me. I didn't see anything good actually… I was in big shock. I was in big shock… It was cold and I didn't like it… I used to be, at school, very involved. And I came here and I couldn't talk. People were doing stuff and I felt like humiliated in a sense.*

School: Placement

- *Here in Canada it's based on your age, you're put according to your age, but from where we come from it's based on your knowledge. You write a test and they put you on a grade that's suitable for you. So I was put back, um, three years behind and I had to repeat Junior High all over again. So that was very frustrating.*

School: Policies

- 3 out of 5 people said school policies were never explained to them, or if they were explained, they never understood them.
- *I'd show up at school and it would be closed, and I'd be like "Oh no, it's a holiday."*

Financial problems

- Parents' foreign credentials, skills, experience not recognized, or
- parents unable to work
- *My three brothers were working, paying for their refugee transportation loan and also ours. So that was a bit challenging because they missed out on their education and even on their communication skill.*

Financial problems

- *By the time you're done paying all the bills, all the money's gone. Nothing – you have nothing left to pay for school fees or to even pay for the [refugee transportation] loan…. My mum, the burden is all mum's, 'cause she's usually paying most of the bills now, so it's really tough on her, like really really tough.*

Perceived racism

- *I have been working in this office for a very long time and there is an opening for a job, which of course I am competent of, but now a white dude comes, (sorry to say), and applies for this job, and he gets it right away. Maybe where there is nobody that can take that job, then I'll get the job.*

Perceived racism

- *I was wiping the table, and the lady... her bag was sitting right beside her; she took her bag, she put it on her lap, then she put it on the other side, and I was like 'WOW! I'm going to steal your stuff?' But I didn't say that, right?... She just got up, took her bag and went to the washroom, and I went to the guy [sitting with her] and like, "You know, not every black person's a thief, can you please tell her that?"... After a while, I was cleaning and the guy was passing by and it was like HE was scared now...*

Perceived racism

- *I was going to Walmart to buy something and it was about 7pm in winter, so it was a little dark outside. So this lady was approaching, she looked like she was 25, and she had her handbag, just walking and approaching. And I just started to [ask directions], and she just had her bag LIKE THIS and she started running....*

Perceived racism

- *DWB, Driving While Black....*

  [My friend] bought a [BMW] and they [the police] are always stopping him and asking him like "Is this your car? What are you doing with this car? Is this car stolen?"

Stereotyping

- *I'll be walking in the street with my hoodie on, and people will ask me, "Are you selling weed?" or they're asking me if I want to buy weed, and it's really easy to get involved in that…*

Community supports

- ESL classes and school programs
- Friendship networks
- Faith communities
- Organizations such as
- Catholic Social Services
- Multicultural Health Brokers

1. School: ESL classes

- *I love the school because everybody was so welcoming. Especially the department head of ESL, (name). That lady has helped me from the beginning. That was a good thing, the ESL program.*

School: Activities

- *The school's Student Public Relations committee… provided me with all these opportunities and all skills that I need to learn. It's pretty much like a student leader organization, so we would go volunteer at different places, at different events at the school, so it really builds up our self-confidence and how we interact with people. I think it built up our public speaking skill because we would participate in the meetings every Monday. And it was a really, really, really positive student body.*

2. Friendship networks

- *I went to (high school) where I think I was the only student from Eritrea. I think it was a good thing because I was able to make friends with people from other cultures as well.*
- *Not having Latino friends in the beginning helped me to get involved in different things. And outside of school also.*
- *I realized after two years or a year and a half that I really need to expand my horizon of friends and because I think that by doing that, there's a lot more opportunities that I can make.*

3. Faith communities

- *[Church] did a lot for us, especially for my family. It's a big thing in our family and so to find that, it was like we had a community. Somewhere to belong.*

Faith communities

- *It's my faith... my beliefs that've been holding me together living in this country, because it's just very similar. We're very far from our family, we're very far from our friends, we don't know our surroundings, but it's just... that I know that God is there and He's looking after us and we should not just worry about anything. But it's my part that I need to open up myself to the surroundings.*

4. Community organizations

- *I was very involved in Catholic Social Services. They have programs, or they used to have before, where like every Tuesday and Thursday they will teach about the Canadian culture, so how the police work, you know, rules and stuff… And they have a summer program where they show you around the city, so my sisters and I were part of that… And they … gave us something like our sponsor family. So we had like a family that helped us out around the city.*

Recommended services and programs

1. Comprehensive orientation to Canadian systems

- *There needs to be a youth guide where they teach you how does the transportation system work, how does the school system work, in future.*

- Suggestions: through the schools, through settlement agencies, through ethnocultural communities

2. School support

- *Anything that encourages them [youth] to <u>continue going to school</u>, to continue <u>being</u>, you know, <u>successful</u>. Like, these kind of things are very important to me.*

3. After-school programs

- *More after-school programs.... Because usually kids go to school and... you just follow your friends. You don't know where they're going, they just go and start walking in the mall, getting in trouble sometimes. It's easier to like get into trouble... just walking around doing nothing.... It's easier to join gangs. More programs...would encourage kids to like stay and stay active.... They grow up and become new mentors...we really need more programs, because we can't take any chances.*

4. Broader community networks

Ethnocultural communities, NGOs

- *Say for example, you have a Liberian community association here right so this was to work alongside the NGOs, to help people. So if the Mennonite Centre got people from Liberia, for example, to send them to these little communities.*

Current community involvement

- All 5 participants volunteered and were involved in refugee youth-related programs:

  e.g., Air Cadets, sports, church, Catholic Social Services (homework club, music group), Big Brothers Big Sisters, Multicultural Health Brokers Coop, John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, Canadian Council for Refugees

Current community involvement

- *This summer I was helping with Boys and Girls Club; they had a program where they all help junior high kids, they have like difficulties with the culture and stuff. And they all do activities for them. So, kind of like a mentorship program.*

Current community involvement

- *I'm a youth coordinator for my community, and so we run programs for kids, like homework clubs, Girls' Council groups. We go to conferences…*

Current community involvement

- *I helped with the Red Cross... Global Youth Symposium. So it's an experience for Canadians to live what refugees go through...But because it was what refugees go through, we had to have a refugee simulation...I thought I was able to do it, but when we started the simulation it was just too close to what happened to me, it was too torturing.*

Participants' future goals

- *My vision is to see us young Africans, you know, come together and empower ourselves, educate ourselves, be successful. And find a way that we could help our country, our continent, our nation, our people overcome whatever barriers that forced us out of Africa, out of the country we came from to here… Use whatever resources that we were privileged to have here and share it with others.*

Participants' future goals

- *…We went from literally being silver spoon-fed in [country] where my parents were so wealthy, to losing everything in one hour, and then to being… displaced. So you get to see both sides right?… So, having seen all that and experienced all that, for me, it inspires me to do great in life and help those who were not so lucky as I was.*

Participants' future goals

- *I would like to help to build a community. No one is born a criminal, so we just have to train them.... I like to help the youth of the community, as much as I can... because they are the future.*

Limitations of the study

- Dependent on *recommendations* from community partners (interpretations of “youth leader” or “role model” may vary)
- Recruitment factors
- Sensitive issues (reluctance to discuss settlement experiences, etc.)

Future research

- Greater number of participants from
  - a wider range of countries of origin
  - a variety of immigration classes (family class, economic immigrants, refugees)

Thank you.

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