Extracurriculars and Refugee Youth Adjustment in Schools: An Illustrative Review

Alex Knudson
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Background

- Over 1/2 of the 21.3 million refugees worldwide are minors (UNHCR, 2015)
- Past traumas can hinder their adjustment to new communities (Kia-Keting & Ellis, 2007)
- Understanding how they overcome traumas will allow communities and schools to support refugee families during resettlement

Method

- Using key words, we searched online databases (e.g., PsycINFO) for peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals.
- Key words included “refugee”; “adolescent”; and “extracurricular.”
- We found six articles focused on refugee populations and six supplemental articles that focused on non-refugee populations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spaaji, 2015</td>
<td>39 Somali athletes and 12 Somali non-athletes (N = 51)</td>
<td>Community sport (soccer); Belonging scale</td>
<td>In-depth interview; Observations</td>
<td>1. Community sport created stronger feelings of belonging to community, team, or teammates; 2. Refugee females not given an opportunity to participate in the sport</td>
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<td>Weine, Wane, Hakizimana, Tugenberg, Currie, Dahnweh, &amp; Wu, 2014</td>
<td>Burundian Refugees (n = 37) and Liberian Refugees (n = 36)</td>
<td>Protective agents; Protective resources; Protective mechanisms</td>
<td>Minimally structured interviews; Shadowing observations</td>
<td>1. Eight family and community capacities promoted psycho-social well-being: 1) finances for necessities; 2) English proficiency; 3) social support networks; 4) engaged parenting; 5) family cohesion; 6) cultural adherence and guidance; 7) educational support; 8) faith and religious involvement</td>
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<td>Cheong-Clinch, 2009</td>
<td>Female refugees from different African nations (N = 7)</td>
<td>Self-esteem; Self-expression; Peer relationships; Language skills</td>
<td>Students were taught new songs; Met 1 hour/week for 16 weeks; Data was collected via observation</td>
<td>1. Music helped refugee adolescents do better in school by increasing their interaction with teachers and peers; 2. Music education helped youth relate to their peers and increased self-esteem; 3. Participants had more self-confidence and confidence in new language</td>
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<td>Kia-Keting &amp; Ellis, 2007</td>
<td>Somali refugees (N = 76)</td>
<td>PSSM (Psychological Sense of School Membership) scale; WTSS (War Trauma Screening Scale); Self efficacy</td>
<td>Personal interviews</td>
<td>1. School belonging did not moderate the effect of adversities on PTSD; 2. Regardless of the level of traumatic exposure, a sense of school belonging was associated with lower depression and higher self-efficacy</td>
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<td>Whitley &amp; Gould, 2010</td>
<td>Refugees from African nations (N unknown)</td>
<td>PSR (Personal Social Responsibility)</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1. Giving more responsibility to refugee adolescents helped them to adapt to their new lives more quickly</td>
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<td>Ramirez &amp; Matthews, 2008</td>
<td>Refugees from African nations (N = 14)</td>
<td>Educational experiences</td>
<td>Implemented an after-school program and rotated groups of 4 to different stations; Observed their reactions and conducted personal interviews</td>
<td>1. Refugee adolescents did not look to school for positive experiences; 2. They preferred not to discuss their past but would rather focus on the present; 3. Did not join the program to improve in school but wanted to make friends</td>
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</table>

Conclusions

Based on our literature review, extracurriculars appeared to:
- Promote a sense of belonging (e.g., Spaaji, 2015)
- Increase active engagement in the learning process (e.g., Cheong-Clinch, 2009)
- Improve academic performance (e.g., GPA: Camacho & Fuligni, 2015)

Suggestions for Future Research

We recommend that future studies:
- Focus on refugee youth from similar cultural backgrounds so that culture-specific processes and values (e.g., collectivism) can be investigated
- Examine extracurricular type and duration
- Use longitudinal designs
- Use multiple methods of data collection (both qualitative and quantitative), including self-reporting questionnaires, personal interviews, and observation
- Draw from theoretical models that outline stress and resilience pathways, such as the FSM (Masarik & Conger, 2017).

References