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Extracurriculars and Refugee Youth Adjustment in Schools: An Illustrative Review

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Extracurriculars and Refugee Youth Adjustment in Schools: An Illustrative Review

Abstract

Over half of the 21.3 million refugees worldwide are under the age of 18 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015). Although resettlement provides refugee youth relative safety and hope for a new life, they may encounter many challenges as they adjust to their new home, school, and community. They may also suffer from trauma-related health issues as they attempt to adjust. For these reasons, it is important to understand which factors promote resilience in refugee youth despite the stressors they may face so that schools and communities can better assist refugee families during resettlement.

Based on the Family Stress Model (FSM: e.g., Masarik & Conger, 2017), we hypothesized that participation in extracurricular activities promotes positive adjustment among refugee adolescents who are resettling in their place of refuge. We conducted an illustrative literature review to determine whether this hypothesis was supported in existing empirical studies. Overall, we found that extracurricular activities promotes a sense of belonging in schools, personal responsibility, and engagement in the learning process.

In the future, we recommend that researchers focus on refugee youth from similar cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds so that culture-specific processes and values can be investigated in relation to extracurricular activity and adjustment outcomes.

This student presentation is available at ScholarWorks: https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/as_17/40
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 “extracurriculars.”
- 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, Ware, Hakizimana, Tugenberg, Currie, Dahnweih, &amp; Wulu, 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. 2. New programs are needed to promote resilience in adolescent refugees</td>
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<td>Cheong-Clinch, 2009</td>
<td>Female refugees from different African nations (N = 7)</td>
<td>Self-esteem; Self-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 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