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School-Aged Syrian Refugees Resettling in Canada: Mitigating the Effect of Pre-migration Trauma and Post-migration Discrimination on Academic Achievement and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract
In addition to psychological trauma and discrimination, discourse on refugees in Canada contributes to the risk of poor psychological well-being and academic achievement for school-aged Syrian refugees. Canadian public schools are a readily available and effective resource to mitigate risk for school-aged Syrian refugees. Pre-migration trauma and post-migration discrimination have a synergistic impact on refugee children and youths' functioning. Experiencing forced migration and armed conflict increase the likelihood of psychological trauma symptoms that negatively impact on cognitive, behavioral, and emotional functioning. Psychological symptoms inevitably impact on academic ability and achievement. Refugees also face a greater likelihood of discrimination, while being subjected to a nationwide discourse that portrays refugees negatively. Furthermore, discrimination is shown to negatively affect refugee mental health, compounding on existing psychological trauma. Although Canadian schools are well-positioned to support Syrian children and youth, there are gaps in the literature on supporting contemporary refugees in Canadian public schools who exhibit psychological trauma symptoms, as well as the subsequent implications of discrimination. Based on the analysis of current data and research, this paper proposes five recommendations for Canadian public schools to mitigate risk and promote psychological well-being and academic achievement for school-aged Syrian refugees.

Keywords Canada · Syrian refugees · Discrimination · Trauma · Education · Mental health

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Introduction

Between November 2015 and January 2017, the Canadian government welcomed 40,081 Syrian Refugees who resettled in 350 communities across Canada (Government of Canada 2017). Syrians arriving during this period utilized three programs to enter Canada: 21,876 arrived as Government-Assisted Refugees, 14,274 arrived as Privately Sponsored Refugees, and 3931 arrived as Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees (Government of Canada 2017). Of the over 40,000 Syrian refugees who arrived during 2015–2017, over 20,000 were under the age of 18 (CBC 2017, January 3). Given the high number of school-aged Syrian refugees entering Canada, education should be a top priority during relocation and resettlement (McBrien 2005).

The broader discourse across Canadian society shapes the communities in which school-aged Syrian refugees are resettled. In Canada, refugees are not delivered into an objective, open, and accepting society; refugees settle in a society in which pre-existing racialized views and discourse shape and influence how others view and accept them (Matthews 2008). Syrian refugees arriving with psychological trauma symptoms can have greater difficulty with mental health and academic achievement. Experiences of discrimination may further exacerbate existing trauma symptoms, while impacting these children and youth's success within Canadian public schools.

The analysis in this paper is presented in six sections. Section "Effects of Pre-migration Trauma on Psychological Well-Being" examines Syrian refugees' pre-migration exposure to armed conflict, being uprooted from their community, and post-migration stressors due to relocation and resettlement. Armed conflict and forced migration fracture peoples' lives resulting in dramatic shifts in a person's ecological system (Stewart 2011). Understanding Syrian children and youth's pre-migration experiences and the potential effect are central to formulating a response to their needs during resettlement.

Section "Discourse in Canada" discusses Canada's broadly held views on immigrants and refugees, while also presenting the specific discourse in Canada regarding Syrian refugees. The Canadian public and Canadian media provide a context of the societal and cultural milieu in which Syrian children and youth are resettling.

Section "Post-migration Experiences of Refugees in Canada" examines the experiences of refugees resettling in Canada, and the effects post-migration discrimination have on their functioning. The research evidence suggests that in Canada, visible minorities are more likely to experience discrimination when it comes to housing, employment, and treatment by law enforcement and immigration officers (Oreopoulos 2011; Richmond 2001). The treatment of visible minorities, and by extension refugees, increases the risk to their psychological well-being and academic achievement.

Section "Educational Challenges in Canada" examines the educational challenges refugees encounter and their academic outcomes in Canada. The developing child is dependent and vulnerable both physically and emotionally (Sinclair 2001). School attendance is a stabilizing force in the lives of refugee children and provides a mechanism for intellectual growth and development in a safe space (Matthews 2008). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states education should develop a child's personality, talents, and mental health to the fullest potential and calls for measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social integration after armed conflict (UNRHC 1989). If education across Canada is going to support a

refugee child or youth's development to its fullest, gaps, and deficits in educational supports and resources must be identified and addressed.

Section "Recommendations" proposes five recommendations for Canadian public schools that address gaps and deficits in educational supports and resources. The recommendations proposed address school inclusion, special education resources, teacher training and preparedness, and the limits of school-based mental health professionals' clinical knowledge and capabilities.

Effects of Pre-migration Trauma on Psychological Well-Being

Syrian Refugees and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

At minimum, one in ten refugee adults resettling in Europe, Australia, and North America have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), one in 20 suffer from major depression disorder, and one in 25 suffer from a generalized anxiety disorder (Fazel et al. 2005). The consensus of available data on refugees suggest that they have higher levels of PTSD and other lesser mental health disorders, and that refugee children have greater amounts of mental health difficulties than their resettlement country's native-born population (Miller and Rasmussen 2016; Hadfield et al. 2017). PTSD is a potentially disabling condition that results in various distressing symptoms (Fazel et al. 2005) and is characterized by four clusters of symptoms: (1) re-experiencing symptoms such as nightmares, intrusive memories, and flashbacks; (2) avoidance symptoms such as an avoidance of trauma-related thoughts, feelings, objects, and people, or locations that are associated with their trauma; (3) negative changes in cognitions and mood such as distortion in beliefs about oneself or the world, shame or guilt, emotional numbing, feeling of alienation, and difficulty recalling crucial details of their trauma; and (4) alterations in arousal or reactivity symptoms such as hypervigilance, irritability, irresponsible behavior, disturbance in sleeping patterns, and attentional difficulties (Lancaster et al. 2016).

The nature of the Syrian conflict resulted in many Syrians being exposed to traumatic events, including living in a warzone, witnessing violence, torture, murder, parental imprisonment, separation from family and community, and living in a refugee camp (Hadfield et al. 2017). A study of 311 Syrian children in a Turkish refugee camp (Mean age = 12) found that 79% had witnessed a family member dying and 30% reported they had been shot at, kicked, or physically injured (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015). In addition, the study also found that 45% of the children experienced PTSD symptoms (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015). The rates of PTSD among Syrian children must be considered as a central factor impacting on their post-migration resettlement.

Pre-migration Trauma and Post-migration Outcomes

Montgomery (2008) conducted a study in Denmark of 131 refugee youth from the Middle East (76 girls, 55 boys; 11–23 years old; mean age = 15.3). The study assessed participants in 2001–2002 based on records showing the youth had immigrated to Denmark as refugees in 1992–1993 (Montgomery 2008). Of the participants, over 93% had lived in a warzone and refugee camp, nearly 75% had witnessed violence, over 70% had parent(s) who were imprisoned, and over 50% have parent(s) who were

tortured (Montgomery 2008). Post-migration experiences in Denmark were also assessed with nearly 20% reporting they had been attacked, over 30% reporting they witnessed a physical attack, and over 65% reporting they were victims of derogatory remarks (Montgomery 2008). The study found that post-migration stress was a better indicator than pre-migration trauma in predicting psychological problems 8 to 9 years after resettlement (Montgomery 2008). The intersection of pre-migration trauma and post-migration stressors must be highlighted due to the internalizing and externalizing behaviors associated with psychological issues and the resulting impact on academic and peer success (Montgomery 2008). Furthermore, PTSD and psychological symptoms of trauma are associated with impaired cognitive function and academic achievement (Hadfield et al. 2017). Pre-migration trauma symptoms and post-migration stressors produce a synergistic effect that can impact on both psychological well-being and academic achievement.

Beiser (2009) reported that refugee mental health outcomes tend to improve over time and are based on a combination of resettlement experiences, life stressors, and protective factors. A key finding is that pre-migration trauma and post-migration stressors are both risk factors for mental health issues. Beiser (2009) confirms that discrimination can jeopardize a refugee's psychological well-being; however, discrimination is just one of many variables that pose a risk to long-term psychological well-being. Section "Discourse in Canada" discusses Canada's discourse on immigrants and refugees and provides data on how Syrian refugees are viewed by the Canadian public and portrayed in the media. The discourse in Canada is important in understanding how the well-being of Syrian children and youth in Canada will be negatively or positively influenced by their experiences in their home communities, including available social supports, and the social, political, and cultural context of Canada (Hjern and Jeppsson 2005).

Discourse in Canada

Immigrant and Refugee Discourse

In a review of public opinion polls dating from 1975 to 2005, Reitz (2011) found that Canadians strongly support high immigration levels. Positively held views of immigration among Canadians are found in both urban centers with high labor demand like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver and in rural communities where immigrants are viewed as economically stimulating (Reitz 2011). Broadly held positive regard for immigration and immigrants are common in Canada; however, there appears to be a discrepancy between support Canadians' express for multiculturalism in theory and in practice.

A Focus Canada survey conducted in 2015 on immigration and multiculturalism revealed discrepancies among views expressed by the Canadian public. The survey reported that 54% of Canadians held multiculturalism as an important national symbol, along with other national symbols like Canadian healthcare and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Environics Institute 2015). However, 47% of Canadians polled agreed with the statement that "Most people claiming to be refugees are not real refugees" (Environics Institute 2015). Although the findings represent a decrease since 2012, nearly half of those polled hold views that are counter to the values and beliefs of a

multicultural Canada. In a 2017 Angus Reid Survey, 53% of those polled believed that Canada was being too generous to those arriving "illegally", and seven of 10 wanted to prioritize available resources for security and monitoring at the border over any assistance to those seeking asylum (ARI 2017a). Public opinion surveys may not be wholly representative of the Canadian public, but they do support, to a certain degree, the notion of discrepancy between abstractly held values and beliefs and the practical application of multiculturalism. Canada Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale recently informed the Canada Border Services Agency to increase deportations of failed refugees (iPolitics 2018, Oct 31). The Canada Border Services Agency has set a target to increase deportations by up to 35% in 2019 (CBC 2018, Oct 30). During a time when refugee asylum seekers are at their peak since the Second World War (World Health Organization 2015), the Canadian government is working to deport people deemed ineligible, many of them are being sent back to countries experiencing humanitarian crises.

Refugees are expected to integrate into society, despite no legal or policy definition existing for successful integration (Presse and Thomson 2008). The UNHRC resettlement handbook states that integration is a mutual endeavor, is ongoing, complex, dynamic, and multifaceted (UNHCR 2011). It is concerning to note that 65% of Canadians polled believed too many immigrants are not adopting 'Canadian values' (Environics 2015). The notion that newcomers must adopt 'Canadian values' bifurcates the broader discourse on refugees into deserving and undeserving groups of people based on their perceived values and culture, ultimately creating some difficulties for newcomers during resettlement.

A 2017 survey of Canadians found only 40% were accepting of Syrian refugees resettling in Canada, whereas 36% were indifferent, and 24% wanted an outright ban (Donnelly 2017). Supporting a ban or remaining indifferent conflicts with the generally accepted notion that Canadians are open and welcoming. An additional 2017 survey conducted by the Angus Reid Institute found that 25% of respondents felt Canada should have adopted the same Muslim ban as the USA—which would have temporally banned Syrian refugees (ARI 2017a). While an extreme reaction, and certainly not representative of the Canadian majority opinion, an online petition titled 'Stop resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada' garnered nearly 50,000 signatures (Kanji 2016). In 2016, just over half (52%) of Canadians supported the government's plan to resettle Syrian refugees, 44% opposing the government decisions, and upward of one-quarter of Canadians wanting to ban Syrian resettlement altogether (ARI 2016; Donnelly 2017). What the data suggests, to a certain extent, is that Canada is not fully committed to multiculturalism in practice and not wholly accepting of newly landed Syrian refugees.

Syrian Refugees and the Media

The media is a critical component in shaping perspectives and opinions in Canada. A recent study examined media coverage from September 2015 to April 2016 while Canada was in the process of resettling Syrian refugees. This study utilized a thematic qualitative discourse analysis of 130 *Toronto Star* articles, 94 *Globe and Mail* articles, and 80 *National Post* articles (Tyyska et al. 2017). A video media content analysis was also conducted on 57 CTV news clips from YouTube, 16 AOL Huffington Post videos

published on their website, and 11 CBC news clips on YouTube (Tyyska et al. 2017). After group-based analysis and discussion, the researchers identified three key themes.

- Media sources analyzed in this study found that individual Canadians, politicians, and other non-Syrians spoke on behalf of refugees and who ultimately professed a narrative of Canada as humanitarian and generous. Furthermore, any anti-Islamic or racist acts were deemed 'un-Canadian', as the media sought to uphold Canada's role as a savoir of refugees.
- The media sources portrayed Syrian refugees as lacking agency, being vulnerable, and being needy due to their challenges. The media often used non-Syrians and Canadians in their reporting, minimizing the voice of Syrians and furthering the process of 'othering' a group of 'needy and helpless refugees'.
- The analysis found a gendered representation of Syrian males as security threats due to potential terrorism, while simultaneously labeling women and children as vulnerable. This ultimately contributed to the view that the Syrian refugee population was inferior to Canadian-born citizens and Canadian residents (Tyyska et al. 2017).

Tyyska et al. (2017) analysis of Canadian media coverage demonstrates how pervasive Canadian values and beliefs are in Canada, and how they are presented to the public through media outlets. Section "Post-migration Experiences of Refugees in Canada" presents evidence on the discrepancy between Canada's image as a multicultural, humanitarian, and generous nation and the actual experiences of immigrants, refugees, and visible minorities living in Canada.

Post-migration Experiences of Refugees in Canada

Refugee Experiences of Discrimination

Newcomers to Canada arrive with hopes and dreams and are inundated with terms like rights, freedoms, multiculturalism, and equality (Nagia 2013). Richmond (2001) argues that Canada's shift from a racist Anglo-conformist society toward an open, multicultural, and ethnically diverse one is mainly superficial in nature. He argues that visible minorities in Canada are more likely to experience differential treatment, racism, and violence when it comes to housing, employment, and treatment by law enforcement and immigration officers (Richmond 2001). Furthermore, the demand by some Canadians for newcomers to adopt 'Canadian values' does accord with evidence that compared to immigrants of European descent, visible minority immigrants in Canada face greater likelihood of being racialized and stigmatized and face reluctance from Canadian-born citizens to accept them as legitimate members of society (Environics 2015; Li 2003).

The 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey data reveals the high prevalence of discrimination against visible minorities in Canada (Dion et al. 2009). The study found over a period of 5 years prior to the survey that 35% of visible minorities had experienced discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, or skin color (Dion et al. 2009). Among visible minorities, a person's race was the most reported factor contributing to someone's experience of discrimination (Dion et al. 2009). In another study, Statistics Canada

reported that one in six immigrants experienced discrimination 5 years preceding a 2014 survey (Statistics Canada 2018a, 2018b). Among visible minorities surveyed, three out of five believed their experience of discrimination was based on their race or skin color (Statistics Canada 2018a, 2018b). In addition, an Ontario Human Rights Commission public survey in 2017 found that of those surveyed, 48% who experience discrimination did not report it to authorities (Ontario Human Rights Commission 2017). The available research and data demonstrate that visible minorities experience much higher rates of discrimination than the public in general and that these incidents of discrimination are vastly underreported.

While the media has reported on some high-profile cases of anti-immigrant behaviors and hate crimes in Canada, most experiences are not reported at all. In 2011, a woman shopping with her 3-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter at a shopping mall in Ontario were approached by two women who began swearing at them about religion, her niqab, telling them to go back to their own country, and physically assaulting them by ripping off the mother's niqab (CBC 2011, Nov 22). The mother reported that the worst part of the encounter was her children no longer feeling safe in Canada. (CBC 2011, Nov 22). In 2016, someone spray painted "Syrians go home and die" on the wall of a Calgary school (CBC, Feb 15, 2016). Though this act of hate-driven vandalism was condemned by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, incidents of this nature continue to occur across Canada. In 2017, there were 2073 police-reported hate crimes in Canada, an increase of 47% over the previous year (Statistics Canada 2018a, 2018b). Furthermore, 43% of police-reported hate crime in 2017 was motivated by hatred toward a victim because of their race or ethnic background (Statistics Canada 2018a, 2018b). Police reports are one way to track hate crimes, another is self-reported victimization data. The 2014 General Social Survey on Canadian Safety found 330,000 self-reported incidents of crime in which hate was perceived as the primary motivation; two-thirds of those incidents were not reported to police (Statistics Canada 2018a, 2018b). The experiences of immigrants, refugees, and visible minorities in Canada demonstrate that they experience much higher rates of victimization because of their race, ethnicity, skin color, language, and religious affiliation. Furthermore, discrimination and hate-motivated crimes are underreported to authorities. These societal discourses and experiences shape the context of reception of refugee children and youth both in school and in their communities after settlement.

Effects of Discrimination on Academic Achievement

The research evidence suggests a link between experiences of explicit and implicit discrimination and poor academic achievement. Graham et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of 34 studies and found it was common for refugee-background children to experience school and peer-based abuse, including overt racism, bullying and subtle forms of discrimination that ultimately affected learning, overall well-being, health, and acculturation. In a Vancouver study, 33 young men ranging in age from 15 to 22 years old who identified as having immigrant or refugee backgrounds participated in a qualitative study focused on the social aspects of mental health (Hilario et al. 2018). The young men viewed education as a requirement for a good future, resulting in positive academic achievement being associated with excitement, whereas failures were associated with significant distress (Hilario et al. 2018). Poor academic

achievement was associated with shame and a perceived sense of inability; at times participants felt that the amount of effort required for academic success surpassed their mental and physical ability, given the non-academic responsibilities they had in their life (Hilario et al. 2018). Furthermore, these young men were confronted by experiences of marginalization, stereotypes, and presumptions about their cultural background within the school system, and they described the distress that accompanied witnessing mistreatment of peers and their own experience of perceived unfair treatment in the school system (Hilario et al. 2018). This study found that, despite a discourse of social inclusion and multiculturalism in Canada, these young men had experiences that reflected a different reality, one including hopelessness and failure to realize their dreams (Hilario et al. 2018).

Another qualitative study in Winnipeg interviewed refugee students, teachers, administrators, and the community to understand the experiences of refugees and those who support them (Stewart 2011). Whether actual or perceived, racism and discrimination represent an ongoing challenge for refugee students (Stewart 2011). Students talked about not feeling safe on the streets, and being persecuted for the color of their skin, profiled by police, and mistreated by students, teachers, and administrators at their school (Stewart 2011). The experiences of refugee students in Canada highlight the crucial need to address racism and discrimination in Canadian schools. Yet schools often mirror the issues and discourses prevalent in the broader local and national community (Stewart 2011). One teacher in the study described her classroom as spatially segregated in terms of where students sit, with a white, Indigenous, and immigrant student section (Stewart 2011). In the Winnipeg area, Stewart (2011) reported that teachers and community members believed that schools were not doing enough to encourage cultural understanding among students, given that racism and discrimination were not only observed at the student level, but also at the teaching and administration level (Stewart 2011).

Evidence suggests that race and discrimination is a factor for academic outcomes of refugee youth. Wilkinson (2002) conducted a study looking at factors that influence academic success. The study was based on qualitative data gathered through structured interviews with 91 refugee youth aged 15 to 21. Wilkinson (2002) defined success as being ‘on-track’ for completion of high school and being educationally prepared to enter post-secondary education. Wilkinson (2002) found that ethnicity had the strongest influence on educational status, more so than time spent in Canada, gender, English language abilities on arrival, school enjoyment, age, and mental health. The study found refugees from the former Yugoslavia were more likely to be ‘on-track’ in their education because these students were close to mainstream ‘white’ or Canadian culture, making integration easier (Wilkinson 2002). Conversely, refugees from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds with less similarity to ‘white’ or Canadian culture faced more difficulties with integration resulting in poor academic achievement (Wilkinson 2002). Although this study did not measure the direct impact of discrimination and racism on a refugee’s academic achievement, the inference is that institutional racism, systematic discrimination, and implicit forms of racism and discrimination negatively impact on refugee academic achievement (Wilkinson 2002).

Experiences of racism and discrimination in Canadian schools and communities have the potential to negatively impact academic achievement. Based on available research and data, discrimination should be noted as a risk factor for school-aged Syrian

refugees in Canada. Anti-refugee discourses, racism, and discrimination currently harm the academic success of Syrian youth and exacerbate the negative consequences of trauma and stresses of resettlement. As a signatory of the UN convention for the protection of refugees, Canada has an obligation to support refugees who have experienced armed conflict and forced migration, which includes mitigating and challenging experiences of discrimination in Canadian society (Beiser and Hou 2017).

Educational Challenges in Canada

Academic Achievement in Canada

Research consistently finds that refugee children, youth, and families highly value education (MacNevin 2012). Additionally, refugee youth identify education as a top priority, and describe its potential to improve their lives (Stewart 2011). Syria reported universal enrollment in primary education and near-universal enrollment in secondary education prior to civil war (Watkins and Zyck 2014). Overall studies find refugees have had success in the Canadian education system. Stermac et al. (2010) found students from globally recognized war-zones who had experienced traumatic events performed as well as Canadian-born students, even surpassing them in certain subjects. There are exceptions to this overall pattern, as demonstrated by Wilkinson's (2002) finding that refugees from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds have lower academic achievement than other refugees with backgrounds analogous to 'white' or Canadian culture. Mitigating the risk to refugee students' academic achievement requires identification of the gaps and deficits in educational supports and resources.

Challenges in Education

Available research and data have been limited on why refugee students do well or poorly in Canadian schools. What is known is success in school is critical to refugee student's overall well-being (Graham et al. 2016). Schools are one of the first and most significant service systems that school-aged refugees engage with and learn to navigate, something that is crucial but fraught with challenges (Kia-Keating and Ellis 2007). Educators must create inclusive schools that are culturally safe, as schools represent a critically important transition period for refugee children, youth and their families (Graham et al. 2016). Research has identified several intersecting components that appear to impact refugee students' academic achievement. Supporting English (or French in Quebec) language acquisition, teacher preparedness, and mental health supports together appear to meet the unique needs of refugee students in school (MacNevin 2012; Skidmore 2016; Stewart 2011). If schools in Canada focus resources on these three objectives, they can potentially improve the academic success of refugee youth.

English as a Second Language Language acquisition is an obstacle for refugees, given that acquiring basic language competency does not translate into academic language and literacy skills (Stewart 2011). Poor English language skills also negatively impact teacher ability to assess refugee students' strengths and needs, requiring additional resources for translators (Skidmore 2016). Unfortunately, language acquisition

resources are limited and currently do not meet the growing demand of high needs students requiring educational assessments, ESL supports, and individual and personalized education supports (Skidmore 2016).

Teacher Training In a qualitative study exploring educational directions for refugee students, teaching, and learning practices in Prince Edward Island, Canada, MacNevin (2012) found that teachers described needing increased training in best practices for teaching students that have experienced traumatic events, teaching strategies for delivering basic reading instruction to refugee students', and instruction on implementing school inclusion practices for refugee students' (MacNevin 2012). The findings are based on fieldwork including a combination of qualitative methods and data from four sources including analysis of policy documents from four provinces, interviews with seven teachers and itinerant teachers with experiences teaching refugee students, classroom observations, and journals completed by refugee students (MacNevin 2012).

In Winnipeg, Stewart (2011) reported that schools do not have adequate resources and training for teachers and personnel who respond to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds. A principal in Winnipeg reported that the school was given additional professional development time and teacher training when they experienced an increase in refugee enrollment, but the principal noted that it was possible this was a onetime occurrence (Stewart 2011). A teacher reported that the only preparation he received for incoming African and Middle Eastern refugees was a notification that they would be joining the school as students; no other training or information was provided (Stewart 2011). While teacher training can be expensive and time-consuming, without proper development of school staff, it is very difficult to meet the unique needs of refugee students requiring supports.

Mental Health Support Refugees tend to underutilize mental health services in western countries in part due to cultural differences (Miller and Rasco 2004). At the same time, there exists a lack of adequate resources and services to meet needs. If refugees seek mental health services, they most likely will be placed on a waitlist for access to services. Children's Mental Health Ontario's 2016 report card found that over 6500 adolescents had to wait over 1 year to access mental health treatment (Newnham 2016, July 12). In Canada, many children and youth do not have ready access to mental health services in their communities.

One of the most potentially effective and efficient ways to provide access to mental health services and supports to refugee children and youth is at school. Research finds that refugees underutilize community-based mental health services, but highly value education (MacNevin 2012; Miller and Rasco 2004; Stewart 2011). Yet, while school-based counselors are typically trained to help students with stress, family conflict, and trauma; they are generally not trained to deal with complex trauma resulting from armed conflict and forced migration (Stewart 2014). School counselors would benefit from increased knowledge of global, social, and political contexts of war, and the effect on children and youths' psychological well-being, as well as economic and political factors that impact refugees and their experiences in Canada (Stewart 2014). Training school-based mental health professional in trauma-informed care and empirically based treatment interventions could enhance their effectiveness working with refugee children and youth.

Recommendations

This article discusses some of the negative consequences of pre-migration trauma and post-migration discrimination on the psychological well-being and academic achievement of refugee children and youth in Canada. The article presents evidence of the negative consequences of the national discourses of refugees in Canada, discrimination, racism and hate crimes on the experiences and academic achievement of refugee children and youth who are grappling with a range of settlement challenges and pre-migration trauma. It also presents evidence on the negative consequences of a lack of adequate resources to support the educational achievement of these children and youth in Canadian schools. Based on the findings, we recommend investment into the following five domains to mitigate the negative consequences of pre- and post-migration trauma and improve the academic and long-term economic success of Syrian refugee children and youth in Canada: school inclusion, special education resources, teacher training and preparedness, and school-based mental health professionals' clinical knowledge and capabilities. Specially, we recommend:

- Creation of permanent strategic planning committees at the Provincial and district school board levels to address issues of school inclusion, focusing on regions with significant numbers of enrolled refugee students.
- Increased funding for special education resources and services to address wait times for psychoeducational assessments and/or language assessments required for students to receive individual education supports and/or assistive technology.
- Training in trauma-informed care/practice for teachers and administrators, focusing on regions with significant numbers of enrolled refugee students.
- Professional development and training for teachers and educational support staff in specialized, inclusive, culturally competent teaching strategies and techniques for classroom instruction with refugee children and youth.
- Clinical training for school-based mental health professionals in trauma-informed and empirically based treatment interventions for children and youth who have experienced traumatic events and/or are experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Several evidence-based treatment interventions have been developed to address trauma in children; cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been generally accepted as an effective trauma-informed treatment for children and youth (National Child Traumatic Stress Network 2005). Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) has been successful with immigrants experiencing trauma symptoms and could therefore be a potentially suitable intervention for refugee children and youth (NTCSN 2005). *Treating Trauma and Traumatic Grief in Children and Adolescents* (Cohen et al. 2006) is a well-regarded treatment manual and may be considered a starting point for school-based mental health professionals supporting children and youth affected by trauma.

Despite challenges, the Canadian education system continues to be recognized as a top performer internationally (PISA 2015 Results in Focus 2016). Yet, refugees face challenges in the school system that native-born Canadians do not. Man-made environmental disasters, domestic and international conflicts, and growing economic disparities have shaped the growing transnational migration patterns. Institutions should adapt, and

policymakers should look to inventive solutions that address the unique needs of immigrants and refugees (Hilario et al. 2018). The Canadian education system can better meet the needs of Syrian refugee students. The return on investment, through the adoption and integration of the proposed recommendations, would not only improve the mental health and academic success of Syrian refugee children and youth, but also represent a longer-term investment in the future economic prosperity and social fabric of the country. Canada has committed to meet its obligations to meet the needs of Syrian newcomers, which includes providing the resources to mitigate the impact of pre-migration trauma and a context of reception that sets the stage for academic and economic success.

Conclusions

The reforms to support services in Canadian schools proposed in this article would have positive impacts at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level, especially if combined with broader reforms to address unemployment/precarious employment, discrimination, and other social support underfunding and gaps that negatively impact not only refugees. Despite the barriers and challenges, we remain optimistic about the future success of Syrian refugee children and youth in Canada. There is a long history of previous waves of immigrants and refugees overcoming major barriers and obstacles to achieve success in Canada. Yet, that does not mean that reforms are not urgently needed to mitigate the consequences of pre-migration trauma and improve the context of reception for Syrian refugee children, youth, and families today.

Future research on refugee academic achievement should consider variables of ethnicity, race, and culture. Research should examine the vastly different experiences of each refugee group. For example, scholars could compare the lived experiences of Syrians versus Tamil, Roma or Sudanese refugees in Canada. This research could examine how refugees' ethnicity, race, culture, and their unique set of pre- and post-migration experiences, including trauma and discrimination, impact refugee's academic achievement and psychological well-being. The synergistic effect of pre- and post-migration experiences pose various risks and challenges to optimal academic outcomes, psychological well-being, and the ability to succeed in Canada. Education is a central institution in the lives of refugee children, youth and families. Positive educational experiences serve as a strong protective factor to school-aged Syrian refugees in Canada (Hadfield et al. 2017). Inclusive schools, trauma-informed teachers and administrators, and effective teaching strategies and mental health supports can mitigate the risks of pre-migration trauma and post-migration discrimination and promote improved psychological well-being and academic achievement for school-aged Syrian refugees in resettling in Canada.

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