Literature Review

Determinants of Educational Success for Refugee Youth in Toronto

2011
To be cited as:


The content for this literature review was written by Nyembezi Zviuya in collaboration with the Refugee Youth Health Project team. The Refugee Youth Health Project team members include:

The report was reviewed and published by Access Alliance.

The Refugee Youth Health Project was made possible with generous funding from Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

Creative Commons

Requests for permission and copies of this report should be addressed to:
Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
500-340 College Street
Toronto, ON
M5S 3G3
Telephone: (416) 324-8677
Fax: (416) 324-9074
www.accessalliance.ca

© 2011 Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
Background on the Refugee Youth Health Project
This literature review was commissioned as part of the third phase of the Refugee Youth and Health Project. The Refugee Youth Health Project (RYHP) is a community-based research project initiated in 2008 by Access Alliance to build evidence about key determinants of health for youth who have come to Canada as refugees. The first phase of this project investigated the systemic challenges/barriers and supports that refugee youth experience in understanding, coping and managing their roles and responsibilities in Canada. The second phase involved a small research project using Digital Storytelling methodology with 8 refugee youth to generate preliminary findings about challenges that refugee youth face in the education sector. Phases one and two focused on Sudanese, Afghan and Karen refugee youth ages 16-24.

This third phase of this project builds on the second phase to conduct a more in-depth investigation and policy review about educational gaps and challenges that refugee youth between the ages 16 to 30 face before and after coming to Canada, and to explore the relationship between education and health; particularly mental health. The current phase follows a participatory policy review process to identify policy gaps and policy recommendations for overcoming systemic barriers that refugee youth face in pursuing their educational/learning goals. This process has brought together youth peer researchers from refugee background, policy makers, academic partners and community agency partners to examine evidence generated from Phase 2 of the Refugee Youth Health Project. The other components are: a policy scan, a literature review and key informant interviews with policy makers and service providers. The project will also identify research gaps about systemic educational challenges that refugee youth face, and collaboratively develop a research proposal and pilot test a research instrument for a research project to be conducted in the following year; funds permitting.
# Table of Contents

Background on the Refugee Youth Health Project ................................................................. 3

Executive Summary .............................................................................................................. 5

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 7

Organization of Literature Review .................................................................................... 9

Methods .............................................................................................................................. 9

Findings ............................................................................................................................... 10
1. Diversity of Refugee Youth ............................................................................................... 10
2. Refugee Youth Educational Experiences ......................................................................... 11
   2.1 Primary/Secondary /High school experiences ............................................................ 11
   2.2 Post-secondary /Tertiary Education Experiences ....................................................... 16
   2.3. English/French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) .... 17
3. Other Determinants of Educational Success .................................................................... 21
   3.1 Age at Arrival ............................................................................................................ 21
   3.2 Gender .................................................................................................................... 22
   3.3. Family ................................................................................................................... 22
   3.4 Race and Ethnicity .................................................................................................... 23
   3.5 Employment and Economic Wellbeing .................................................................... 24
   3.6 Housing .................................................................................................................. 25
   3.7 Sexual Orientation ................................................................................................... 26
4. Relationship with Mental Health ...................................................................................... 26
5. Recommendations in the Findings .................................................................................. 30

Conclusion ........................................................................................................................ 30

Research Directions .......................................................................................................... 31

References ......................................................................................................................... 32
Executive Summary

Since 1999, Canada has been receiving between 25,000 to 35,000 refugees every year (CIC, 2008). This represents about 10-12% of the roughly 250,000 ‘permanent residents’ that settle annually (CIC 2008). Of these, about 16% are youth who are 15 to 24 years old. In general, the percentage of youth (between the ages of 15-24) is slightly larger in refugees (20%) compared to all permanent residents (16%) (CIC, 2007). The majority of these immigrants and refugees are visible minorities. Data from CIC indicate that compared to other immigrant groups, refugees upon arrival in Canada have lower education level, low or no English/French language fluency, and have less than optimal health.

Education is a strong determinant for successful integration for refugees in Canada as it is assumed to facilitate successful labour-market outcomes and social mobility. However, educational success for refugee youth has been uneven as the outcomes are mediated by the various contexts of the refugee youth’s experiences. This literature review looked at current evidence about educational gaps and challenges that refugee youth face before coming to Canada, post-migration systemic enablers and barriers in pursuing their high school and post-secondary educational goals and the relationship between education and mental health.

Research on the experiences of refugee youth in Toronto is limited. However, there is strong evidence from other Canadian and international studies that refugee youth’s educational experiences and outcomes are influenced by a constellation of factors.

Key pre- and trans-migration related factors that influence educational outcomes include:
- Limited availability or access to schools (particularly secondary and tertiary education) (UNHCR, 2009; SCF, add more)
- School closures and disruptions due to war and conflict (references)
- The negative impact of multiple migrations on schooling (references)
- Disruptions in education due to poverty and financial barriers (references)
- Disruptions and negative impact on education and learning due to traumatic experience (Lustig, et al, 2003; add more)

Post-migration related issues that impact education include an environment that appears unsupportive of the student’s aspirations because of:
- The challenge to adjustment in a host country with new language, teaching and learning approaches, education systems, belief systems, values and mores (Clancy, 2007)
- Lack of official language competency (Toohey and Derwing’s, 2008)
- Improper grade placement which sees youth placed in special education, ESL and lower track classes and non-recognition of prior educational achievements (Wilkinson et al., 2010; Wilkinson, 2002)
- High tuition costs for those who aspire to attend post-secondary education (references)
- Sometimes being forced to choose between education and work for an income to provide for themselves, those they live with and to fulfil trans-national obligations (Francis, 2010; Chuang, 2010; Joyce et al.; 2010)
- Employment/income insecurity faced by parents/family which have negative repercussions on children’s education
- Lack of access to affordable and good quality housing (TDSB, 2010).
- Racism, negative stereotyping and bullying in and out of school (Riley and Ungerleider, 2008; TDSB, 2010)

Existing literature also indicate that age at arrival, gender, family status/composition, race or ethnicity, and sexual orientation also affect educational outcomes. For example, students arriving at an older age...
find it difficult to adjust or/meet requirements because of the limited time in the system (Bedri, Chatterjee and Cortez, 2009; McAndrew, 2009).

Protective and enabling factors that promote positive educational outcomes for refugee youth include:
- Refugee youth’s personal attributes especially positive self-esteem (Kanu, 2008)
- Strong family and ethnic ties (Beiser, 2009)
- Religious faith and institutions (Heidi Ellis et al., 2010).
- A nurturing host society school and social environment (McBrien, 2009)

There is a small but strong body of research that has explored the relationship between refugee students educational outcomes and mental health. Existing evidence highlights that while experiences of trauma and mental health issues can negatively impact learning/educational capacities, the very act of pursuing education can be a protective factor for mental health.
Introduction

Since 1999, Canada has been receiving between 25,000 to 35,000 refugees every year representing about 10-12% of the roughly 250,000 ‘permanent residents’ that settle in Canada annually (CIC 2008). Of these, about 20 percent are youth who are 15 to 24 years old. In general, the percentage of youth (between the ages of 15-24) is slightly larger in refugees compared to all permanent residents (16%) (CIC, 2007). The majority of these immigrants are visible minorities. An observable demographic shift shows more immigrants aged below 30 coming from conflict zones in Africa, the Middle East, South and Central America and the Asia and Pacific regions (Van Ngo, 2009).

In, the report Last in Line, Last in School, Save the Children (2009) estimates that almost 56% of out of school children in the world are in conflict affected nations where school closures tend to be very high. In Afghanistan, for example, more than 650 schools have been closed as of March 2009, which put nearly half a million children in four southern provinces of Afghanistan out of school. In UNHCR administered refugee camps, enrollment of refugee children in primary schools tend to be fairly high (80% of the 1.9 million children in refugee camps were enrolled in primary schools). However, most camps have a limited number of secondary schools. Thus according to UNHCR only 30% of 1.1 million youth in refugee camps were enrolled in secondary education in 2007 (UNHCR, 2009). There is also a gender disparity in favour of boys (UNHCR, 2009). In findings from a review of refugee women’s progress using key benchmarks from 1990 to 2010, refugee girls drop out of schools at a higher rate than boys especially in the higher grades and there are limited opportunities for secondary and university education (Buscher, 2010). There is little mention in these reports about tertiary education except a mention that enrolment in non-formal and vocational training remained at below 10% (UNHCR 2009). This suggests low priority for post-secondary education.

Graca Machel’s landmark report The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children released in 1996 underscored that access to quality education is “essential,” and not secondary, to promoting welfare and peace during crisis and conflict situations. Since this report, a number of international initiatives have been mobilized in this direction. For example, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies was established in 2000 to ensure that nations meet minimum standards of education in emergency and conflict situations. Between 2006 and 2008, humanitarian funding for education doubled from $122 million to $235 million in 2008. Some progress has been made in a number of war torn countries to rebuild schools and get children back to school. For example, the Go-to-School Initiative in Sudan has succeeded in bringing 1.6 millions children back to school. However, education continues to receive less than 4% of total humanitarian funding in war torn nations and is often the first area to be rolled back during budget cuts.

With the enactment of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002, Canada made firm commitments to sponsor refugees primarily on humanitarian grounds and removed restrictions on “admissibility” based on medical, economic, and educational criteria. This has meant an increase in the number of youth with disrupted learning experiences and who have lived in refugee camps for extended periods, while some have experienced multiple migrations; moving from one unstable situation to another. Data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) indicate that compared to economic immigrants, refugee immigrants upon arrival to Canada have significantly lower levels of education and fluency in English or French. Arrival data from 2000 to 2009 indicate that on average, refugee immigrants 15 years and older are 4 times more likely than economic immigrants (32.3% vs. 8.43%) to have had 9 years or less of schooling. Since 2005, the percentage of refugee immigrants 15 years and older with 9 years or less of schooling has been steadily increasing from 27.7% in 2005 to 38.3% in 2009 (CIC, 2010). Similarly, since 2005, the percentage of refugee immigrants who spoke neither English nor French has been increasing, while for economic immigrants this figure has been decreasing. In 2009 there was a twofold difference between the two groups of immigrants (44.4% for refugee immigrants compared to 21.1% for economic immigrants) (CIC, 2010).
Education is a pre-requisite for the successful integration of immigrants and refugees in Canada. It is assumed to facilitate successful labour-market outcomes, social mobility, and integration. Access to education becomes even more vital to refugee communities because of the high rates of educational gaps and disruptions they may have faced before coming to Canada. However, a policy scan conducted by the Refugee Youth Health project found that there are few policy initiatives to specifically enable refugee youth to overcome educational gaps and that existing equity policies within education sector is not sensitive to unique challenges and barriers faced by refugee students. The scan also found that there is a tendency to conflate the experiences of refugee youth under the category of immigrant youth which may result in the system overlooking the unique needs of refugee youth.

The Ontario Ministry of Education initiated the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in 2007 in order “to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to student achievement and celebrate diversity and respect in all of the schools.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, Quick Facts on Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy). This initiative provides a potential opportunity to address the needs of refugee youth, particularly those that have experienced gaps in education before coming to Canada.

The focus of this literature review is to gather evidence on the gaps and challenges refugee youth face before coming to Canada and post-migration systemic enablers and barriers in pursuing their educational goals. It also explores the relationship between education and mental health. Based on Canadian and comparable international studies, this review covers high school and post-secondary education as well as other systemic determinants of educational success. The review follows an ecological framework which recognizes the impact of the intersecting systems the youth traverse (family, community, workplace, macro level environments/policies) (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen and Frater-Mathieson, 2004).

Global Refugee Resettlement Trends

The 1951 U. N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as "a person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

Of this, 11.4 million refugees and 13.7 million IDPs (total of 25.1 million) are formally under the protection of UNCHR mandate. An additional 4.6 million Palestinian refugees are under the responsibility of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Of the total 51 million IDPs globally, about 26 million were displaced as a result of armed conflict and another 25 million were displaced by natural disasters. According to UNCHR (2008) there are an additional 12 million “stateless” people worldwide who have not been formally recognized as “displaced per se.”

Of the refugees under UNHCR mandate at the end of 2007, 3.1 million are Afghan refugees (representing 27%), 2 million are Iraqi refugees, 550,000 are Colombian refugees, and 523,000 Sudanese refugees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1: Global Refugee Numbers in 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees under UNHCR mandate: 11.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees under UNRWA mandate: 4.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internally Displaced People (IDPs): 51 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stateless people: 12 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since World War II, Canada has granted protection to over 700,000 refugees. The 1976 Canadian Immigration Act formally distinguished between refugees and immigrants. This laid out both a claim determination system for refugees landing in Canada as well as introducing a humanitarian category for government sponsored refugee resettlement.

**Box 2: Top Refugee Populations under UNHCR mandate:**

1. Afghan refugees: 3.1 million
2. Iraqi refugees: 2 million
3. Colombian refugees: 550,000
4. Sudanese refugees: 523,000
5. Somalian refugees: 457,000
6. Refugees from Burundi: 376,000
7. Refugees from D.R. of Congo: 370,000

Of the 27,000 refugees that settle in Canada annually, about 12,000 get settled in Canada through the “In-Canada Asylum” stream in which people apply as refugee claimants upon entering Canada and then become “permanent residents” once their claim process is approved by a quasi-judiciary body called IRB. About 11,000 refugees come as “sponsored” refugees under the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement stream: 7,500 as Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), 3,500 as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs). The remaining 5,000 settle in Canada as family dependents of people who have come as refugees. [See Box 1 for more detail about refugee resettlement process in Canada]

**Organization of Literature Review**

The organizational framework of this literature review is as follows:

The first section in the findings explores the diversity of refugee youth. The next section discusses the pre-and post migration educational experiences of refugee youth within secondary and post-secondary sector as well as literacy and English/French language classes. The intersections with other key determinants of educational success (including age, race, gender, sexual orientation, employment security, housing) are explored in the third chapter. The fourth chapter discusses the relationship between educational experiences and mental health.

**Methods**

The objective of this literature review was to examine literature on refugee youth’s educational experiences to answer the following questions:

1. What educational gaps do refugee youth face prior to coming to Canada?
2. What are the systemic enablers and barriers youth face in pursued their educational goals post-settlement?
3. What is the relationship between education and mental health?

Considerations in this literature review included:

1. Sponsored refugees, both Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) and refugee claimants
2. Pre-migration factors that impact the educational outcomes of youth from a refugee background
3. Post-migration factors impacting youth from a refugee background
4. Analysis of literature primarily Canadian (50%); the United States of America (USA) 35% and 15% international
5. Current literature from 2003 to the present
6. Primarily peer reviewed literature as well as grey literature from reputed sources that have used sound methodology

The methodology this review employed was by searching major academic databases including ERIC, the database for educational research; Sociological Abstracts; Canadian Periodical Index Quarterly (CPI.Q);
Centre for Refugee Studies: *Refuge*; Prairie Metropolis; CERIS The Ontario Metropolis Centre; T-Space University of Toronto Research Repository; Proquest for the dissertations; published books; Journal of Refugee Studies=15; Google Scholar; At Work Settlement.org Research and Google Scholar. The grey literature was mainly from reports from agencies which provide services to refugees.

Two key studies were included which fall outside of the period. The Yau (1995) study is the only in-depth study that has been conducted to date for refugee students in Toronto to explore the pre, trans and post-migration experiences of refugee youth and how this affects their education. The Wilkinson (2002) study is the only Canadian study so far which explored determinants of educational success for refugee youth by analysing in-school experiences and the school-to-work transitions for on-track, high school only and behind/dropped out students.

The primary key words were refugee youth, immigrant youth, education, mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), housing, and employment.

Secondary searches were conducted using the following search words: immigrant students and Canada=64, English as a Second language; ERIC at Scholars’ Portal – refugee youth /students/adolescents and language=35; Informaworld- refugees and Canada=2, refugee youth and Australia=5, ProQuest ESL secondary school Canada=22, post-traumatic stress disorder; refugee youth and mental health =7; refugee youth and post-traumatic stress=2; refugee youth and trauma=7; refugee youth and education and mental health=16; refugee youth and work/employment=10; youth from a refugee background and settlement=10, refugee youth and post-secondary or tertiary education=19; refugees and education Canada=8

**Findings**

**1. Diversity of Refugee Youth**

In reviewing the body of literature on refugees, the diversity within refugee communities comes to light. It is important to recognize that ‘refugees’ are a heterogeneous group that span diverse and multiply intersecting backgrounds in terms of legal status, class, race/ethnicity, country of origin, education level, experiences of conflict, displacement and ‘forced migration.’ Thus an intersectional and anti-oppressive framework is essential in understanding experiences of refugee communities.

As noted earlier, refugees may arrive in Canada as sponsored refugees (GARs or PSRs) or as refugee claimants through the In-Canada Asylum Stream. Current literature has revealed the unique composition and resettlement experiences of these two categories of refugees. For example, compared to sponsored refugees, refugee claimants tend to younger, more educated and usually come alone. Upon arrival they then have to apply for refugee status which can take up to 5 years or longer. During this time, they receive basic income assistance and emergency health coverage through the Interim Federal Health program. Refugee claimants may apply for work permit and pursue education; however, they are not eligible for government financial assistance (eg OSAP). In contrast, GARs/PSRs are people who have been recognized as ‘conventional refugees’ by UNHCR and may have been living in refugee camps prior to coming to Canada. Unlike refugee claimants, most GARs/PSRs come as families. From 2006 with the Karen refugee resettlement process, CIC has begun to resettle GARs in ‘groups’ to ensure that families/relatives come together along with other refugees from their community. Sponsored refugees tend to have low education and English/French language fluency upon arrival. Sponsored refugees receive government support and orientation before coming to Canada as well as upon arrival. For example, upon arrival, GARs can stay at ‘reception centres’ for several weeks until they find their own accommodation with help from reception centre staff. GARs receive income assistance for a year through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP); if they are unable find after a year, then GARs can go on social assistance. PSRs may receive income support from sponsoring agency/community ____. Interestingly, GARs are required to repay back to the government the transportation costs (airfare and initial set up costs) of coming to Canada. For a family of four, this could easily be about $8000.
The unique experiences of unaccompanied refugee youth or youth without caretakers has been documented by a number of studies (Lustig et al., 2003; Ali and Taraban, 2003; Ali, 2006; Kanu, 2008; Clark-Kazak, 2010). The reasons for arriving unaccompanied include separation from parents or guardians (Ali, 2006; Ali and Taraban 2003, Kanu, 2008), the death of significant adults (Kanu, 2008), and family decision to have children leave places of conflict (Clark-Kazak, 2010). Ali and Taraban (2003) in a review of literature on unaccompanied children and in a subsequent paper by Ali (2006) point to a dearth of research on unaccompanied youth’s experiences.

McBrien’s (2005) literature review of educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States differentiates between anticipatory refugee movements, in which refugees foresee upcoming strife in their homeland and have time to plan, and acute refugee movements in which danger is immediate. For the latter, the youth and their families have no time to bid farewell to relatives and friends, may travel without documentation as a result of the abrupt departure (Fong, 2007; McBrien, 2005), and may have little financial means for support in the initial settlement period (McBrien, 2005).

Review of existing evidence also show that experiences of forced migration, persecution, and deprivation also vary within refugee populations depending on political contexts of the country of birth or transition locations. Refugee youth who have had direct experiences with traumatic events (for example, rape, torture, death, youth forced become child soldiers etc) in their home countries or during migration may be more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Van Ngo, 2009; Lustig, et al., 2003).

Existing literature also highlight the unique experiences of refugees who have lived extended periods in transit camps waiting for their applications to be approved and refugees who have gone through multiple migrations, including being internally displaced (Jacquet, Moore, Sabatier and Masinda, 2008; add references). An Internally Displaced Person (IDP) is a person who flees to another part of their country to seek safety but has not crossed an international border. They may also have had lengthy stays in camps and faced barriers to education even though they are in their country of birth. Studies have documented experiences of acute deprivation transit camps and while migrating, high crime rates in transit camps, and persecution from fellow citizens.

A few studies documented access barriers to faced by refugee children/youth who have become non-status after their refugee claimaint application has been refused (Bejan and Sidhu, 2010).

Other variables that affect the learning outcomes of the refugee students are age on arrival, race or ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.

2. Refugee Youth Educational Experiences

2.1 Primary/Secondary /High school experiences
The bulk of literature on refugee youth education focus on primary and secondary school level. Existing evidence reveal that pre-settlement experiences of disrupted learning and trauma and post-settlement stressors caused by linguistic barriers, unsupportive school environments, economic hardships and social marginalization have a negative impact on educational outcomes for refugee children/youth. However, these may be mediated by personal attributes and the supports that they can access.

There is a large body of literature on the educational experiences of immigrant youth. However, most of these studies conflate the experiences of refugees with those of immigrant youth. While refugee youth face similar types of barriers as those faced by other immigrant youth, it is important to understand the unique barriers refugee youth face due to their particular experiences with forced migration. Those studies that have focused on refugee youth have shed light on the unique challenges that refugee student face
compared to other groups. For example, a groundbreaking study by Yau in 1995 in which she interviewed 135 refugee youth and 60 parents in Toronto found that refugee students have to contend with more challenges compared to other immigrant youth. The volatility of the pre-migration situations, the long and uncertain transition to new host country and the challenges of settlement including dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), precarious residency status and the long process of determination of refugee claimant application, disintegration of family units, frequent relocations, desperate financial situations and intense cultural isolation affected the social and emotional wellbeing of refugee students which in turn resulted in adverse impacts on their education. (Yau, 1995). There appears to be 10 year lag (1995-2005) in research focused on refugee students in Canada; while there were studies conducted during this period on educational experiences of immigrant youth, these studies did not consider or make only marginal references to how refugee student experiences may differ from other immigrant students. Since 2005, a growing body of literature has emerged that focus specifically on refugee students; many of the studies from this period that focus on immigrant students do consider unique challenges faced by refugee students.

2.1.1 Disruptions in Education before Coming to Canada
Refugee youth may emerge from circumstances of extended periods of disrupted learning (Kanu, 2008). Yohani’s (2010) qualitative case study with eight educational cultural brokers for school age children from racialized communities in Edmonton, Alberta found that limited formal schooling can result in challenges beyond typical language and cultural barriers to include a lack of pre-literacy in first language or knowledge of school systems. Magro’s (2007) inquiries with 8 youth and adults from countries affected by wars concluded that because of disrupted learning due to war, there is greater likelihood of difficulties for refugee youth to either start or complete educational endeavours.

2.1.2 Challenges related to adjusting to new school environment
Clancy’s (2007) qualitative study on bullying in Kitchener, Waterloo, with 10 Sudanese refugee students aged 12 to 17 and a steering committee of 9 refugee youth aged 13-18 from other communities whose contributions were compared with those of Sudanese youth found that youth felt challenged by multiple layers of newness including coming to a new country, learning a new language and norms, entering new schools and class streams and the residual effects of the constant instability of starting over repeatedly.

2.1.3 Lack of support from teachers and guidance counsellors
A recurrent aspect in the literature is the youth’s experience of an unsupportive school environment. The schools’ systemic structures and attitudes of school personnel who were described in some studies as distant and uninterested, do not support successful outcomes. Francis (2010) when exploring the barriers African youth and families face in accessing programs conducted a literature review, held sixteen interviews with twenty stakeholders who work with immigrant/refugee youth and small group discussions with forty youth aged 13-30 the majority of who had refugee status as sponsored refugees and refugee claimants and had been in Canada less than three years. The study found there is a perception that teachers and guidance counsellors are unhelpful and in some cases unapproachable. This lack of preparation by teachers to work with refugee youth was also the finding in USA studies (Strelkalova and Hoot, 2005) and Australia (Gifford, Correa-Velez and Sampson, 2009).

2.1.4 Improper grade placement and academic streaming
Also problematic are the practices regarding assessment and grade placement. Older immigrant students in the Hospital for Sick Kids (2005) qualitative study which sought the youth perspective on disengagement from secondary school through in-depth qualitative interviews with students who included refugee students, stakeholders and reviewing both grey and formal literature, complained about the non-
recognition of prior educational achievements at this late stage. Wilkinson, Lauer, Sin, Ka Tat Tsang and Yan (2010) in their seven year longitudinal study of school to work transitions of newcomer youth from Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto found different entry points with refugees from Africa and the Caribbean being placed over three years behind at the time of arrival and having made little progress two years after arrival. Those from Europe are placed closer to their age and are on track while those from Asia were placed on average 2 years behind and were catching up by the year two (Wilkinson et al., 2010). While those from Europe may be from systems that are closer to Canada’s, the study does not explain the differences between those from Asia and Africa and the Caribbean.

Another criticism by students is the automatic placement in English as a Second Language streams (Hospital for Sick Kids, 2005). This is particularly distressing for students who feel they already have official language competency. Likewise, in Baffoe’s (2006) study on French speaking refugee youth, youth who are often placed into Welcome Classes where they only learn basic Math and French for a year find the classes unattractive and unstimulating and feel they are being lumped with younger students in composite classes. Wilkinson (2002) who conducted a study to establish factors affecting the academic success of refugee youth in Canada by drawing from available research studies and data from questionnaires and face to face interviews in a study with 91 youth aged between 15 and 21 in 7 urban centres in Alberta, found that students who felt their placement was appropriate for age and previous educational experiences were more likely to be on track while those who felt it inappropriate, especially too high, were more likely to be in the behind or dropped out categories.

Another complaint in Baffoe’s (2006) study which echoes the Hospital for Sick Kids (2005) study is of a tendency to streamline racialized immigrant youth to sports and vocational programs. This is viewed as a deliberate effort to compromise the students’ aspirations due to reduced expectations. Recently arrived refugee youth often ended up segregated for much of the day in newcomer classes for an entire year and are usually overrepresented in lower tracks or adapted (remedial) (Gibson and Carrasco, 2009) or special education classes the schools’ explanation being they will get more supports (People for Education, 2010). Bedri et al. (2009) in their exploration of issues affecting new refugee and immigrant youth found that newcomer students are forced to repeat grades supposedly to catch up. This produces a vicious cycle of lowered value (Bedri et al., 2009) as the students internalize a sense of not being as smart and rationalize the achievement gaps as due to their own failings, rather than to school policies, programs, and practices (Gibson and Carrasco, 2009). The impact of the devaluation is lower performance (Bedri et al, 2009). The streaming also has a direct impact on their eligibility for some job training programs as young adults (Wilkinson, 2002).

2.1.5 Bullying and Discrimination in Schools
Some refugee youth find themselves targets for bullying (Yau, 1995; Clancy, 2007). Being preoccupied with settlement needs, they are less able to defend themselves (Clancy, 2007). They feel rejected and alienated by their peers. A participant in the Clancy (2007) study described new and different as undesirable qualities that made her vulnerable. Victimized students reported they found it difficult to inform their teachers or caregivers sometimes because of the pressure not to talk of their pain or for fear of further isolation. Coping mechanisms included minimizing the pain, hiding their true feelings, acting tough or retaliation which brings negative consequences (Clancy, 2007).

2.1.6 Access Barriers to Education faced by Non-Status children/youth
Another systemic problem pertains to access challenges faced by non-status youth, which could include people whose refugee claimant has been refused. The Ontario Ministry of Education Act 49.1 states that a person who is less than eighteen years of age shall not be refused admission because the person or the person’s parent or guardian is unlawfully in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, Education Act, R.S.O. 1990). For the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), Bejan and Sidhu’s (2010) study shows access challenges for non-status students and attributes this mainly to a lack of understanding of
the Ontario Education Act among staff members. Only 31 schools (15.4%) indicated that they would enrol a child who lacked immigration status, 57 schools (28.4%) completely denied admission for non-status children and 113 schools (56.2%) did not know if a child without immigration status could be registered at their school. Ambiguous guidelines also resulted in different interpretations *vis a vis* admission of non-status students. The result is that schools located in the same neighbourhood provided different responses with some agreeing that non-status students could be admitted, others saying no or that they did not know. 13 schools indicated that a non-status student was required to pay a fee in order to register for school effectively barring access to the children due to the high fee (Koehl, 2007).

Additionally, the practice of referring families without status to the Board’s Admissions Department presents an additional barrier to admission as some non-status families generally avoid contact with official government bodies or institutions for fear of being reported to immigration officials (Bejan and Sidhu, 2010; Koehl, 2007). This means that there may be some students left out of the school experience or forced to consider other options when their preference may be attending a TCDSB school.

To address access challenges, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy. The issue of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell is however contentious. An OCASI (2009) guide to working with newcomer youth which drew up recommendations based on input from service providers and from 35 youth aged 13 to 24 shows youth’s ambivalence to the policy. On one hand some are unwilling to identify themselves while other youth said the policy results in a failure by authorities to identify the special needs of some of the newcomer students, refugees included, and compromises their learning.

### 2.1.8 School Achievement and Completion

Achievement and progression among refugee students or groups differs. Matthews’ (2008) study analyzed data from the Schooling, Globalisation and Refugees in Queensland project which sought to investigate how State high schools, local communities and State and Federal policies met the educational needs of young refugee students in Queensland, Australia. The study meant to yield three data sets: data from visual research methods from 14 high school refugee students; school-generated data using semi-structured interviews from15 school personnel in 4 regular and one intensive English high school; and policy-generated data using structure and focus group interviews from 29 policy makers in the education and community sectors and community workers in government and NGOs supporting refugee youth. Transcriptions were thematically analyzed in relation to issues highlighted in Australian, UK and US refugee education literature. The findings from this and comparative international studies were that students who were not from literate communities were struggling, literate practices that were taken for granted were not apparent to some of the refugee students and there was need for alternative ways for them to achieve short-term goals and this included using assessment tools to monitor progress rather than summative achievement. Mainstreaming of students with no formal schooling posed challenges for students and teachers (Matthews, 2008).

Rutter’s (2006) comparative study of school practices in five schools with refugee students in different parts of the United Kingdom (UK) yielded mixed findings. The schools’ refugee populations range from 5% to 55% with the largest groups from Turkey, the Kurds, and from Somalia though the five schools combined had refugee students from more than 45 nations. One school was Roman Catholic while the other four were comprehensive (public) schools. Rutter measured student success by the achievement of five (5) General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes, a national academic examination usually taken at 16 which marks the end of compulsory education. In the Rutter (2006) study Somali and Congolese children struggled the most to attain the five passes, with Kurdish students no better at around 3% compared to 33% for white UK and Irish children but Sudanese youth were doing well. Rutter (2006) also observed a deliberate effort by authorities to mask the struggles of Congolese and Somali refugee youth by having them subsumed into the generalised and more successful African immigrant category.

### 2.1.9 Learning disability
American Psychological Association Task Force (APA) (2010) study of literature on the mental health of children from war situations summarizes research findings on educational impacts. Living with disabilities is stressful and in school setting poses extra challenges to those struggling to learn language, overcome educational gaps and adapt to school expectations (APA, 2010). APA states that pre-migration learning disabilities which cause poor behavioural and academic functioning problems may be difficult to identify due to language barriers, cultural differences and emotional struggles. The area of disabilities in refugee education has not received in-depth research.

2.2 Factors that promote educational success

In contrast, McBrien’s (2009) study of school related experiences for refugee girls in the United States and the experiences’ relationship to motivation and academic success, found the students doing well academically due to the interwoven support including family attachment offering a cultural support, the religious motivation from their Muslim faith, supportive teachers, access to specialized services, support from an agency offering comprehensive support in after school homework programs, one to one tutoring for those who struggle, a child advocate in the court system and partnerships that provided counselling services, employment services for the family and planned parenthood sessions.

Fraire’s (2009) qualitative study of 21 high school youth from Burma aged between 13 and 20, who had resided in Utah from two months to a year, and 17 of whom had lived in Thai refugee camps for 5-17 years also showed that despite acculturative challenges including language barriers, lack of familiarity with the education system and procedures and financial difficulties, students appeared to be doing well. However, these were students enrolled in an introductory or transition school where they had access to personalized support, opportunities to learn how to use new technology, individualized career planning, formal and informal mentoring and guidance to resources if it was ascertained that there was an inadequate amount of support. Fraire (2009) acknowledges the limitation in that the study was restricted to youth who were still in school and not those who may have had a different experience and dropped out. The study was also limited to a single transitional school whereas mainstream schools differ in terms of pace of acculturation and instruction, resources available for support and the social network.

The one successful school in the Rutter (2006) study had a refugee support team from the local authority comprising a designated refugee pupil coordinator working with the English as an Additional Language (EAL) team of two EAL teachers and three bilingual classroom assistants. The classroom assistants also supported parents of refugee pupils as case workers to help them access healthcare, decent housing, English lessons and other supports. New students lacking English fluency were placed in classes with a pupil who spoke their language and some were in a concurrent part-time program to learn study skills, school routines and use of information technology. A school counsellor also worked with refugee mental health specialists and the school supported weekend programs for parents of refugee youth. The school also had a system where teachers had access to brief records about each child’s background and was the only school with a written policy on refugee youth and a refugee week to raise awareness in other students through assemblies and displays.

There are opportunities for learning such as the part and full-time adult education programs, on-line learning and credit assessment which may grant credits that will lead to a quicker completion of high school. However, for those who are have literacy challenges, completion may still be a challenge.

The educational outcomes of refugee youth differ even among those from the same group. Students who perceive the school environment as unrewarding experience social and academic problems and, relatedly, once students are perceived at risk, teachers demonstrate less effort, time and overall willingness to work with them (Tilleczek et al., 2008). Rummens, Tilleczek, Bydell and Ferguson (2008) and Ferguson (2008) who traced the trajectory of student disengagement conclude that youth enter disengagement before they actually leave school so this is not an event but a process. Dropping out is often a fragmented experience
and youth trajectories differ also because of the differences in the interplay between risk and protective factors. On the other hand, other studies show that refugee youth are successful if there is comprehensive support.

2.2. Post-secondary /Tertiary Education Experiences

Very little is known about the learning experiences of refugee youth in post-secondary or tertiary education in Toronto. The literature scan resulted in negligible studies for the Canadian context but some studies have been conducted in Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). For university youth, one challenge is the financial cost of university but they share the struggles that secondary school youth face regarding language, teaching and learning approaches and the extra roles they have to fulfil on top of the study demands. Post-secondary experiences for youth in Canada is a big research void which needs addressing.

Magro’s (2007) study conducted a Canadian study using in-depth interviews, biographies, and narrative inquiries of 8 adults including young adults from countries affected by wars on their personal and educational challenges and ten literacy educators who worked with youth and adults from these countries. The most frequently identified barrier was the difficulty in developing English language proficiency.

Apart from language, Earnest, Joyce, de Mori and Silvagni (2010) summarised refugee students’ post-secondary education challenges as having to learn more things simultaneously: technology, communication and expected academic styles of assessment compared with other students who only have to learn the coursework and do not have to deal with acculturation and settlement issues. As more mature students, there is a duality of roles where students see themselves as learners and providers which places extra pressure on them.

A United Kingdom (UK) study in the northern Yorkshire and Humber, a region with an estimated 9000 supported asylum seekers (refugee claimants) to establish the aspirations of young refugees to access to higher education and whether these aspirations were being supported concluded that because of previous disrupted learning, inadequate language skills and due to changes in the systems many refugees circulate round the education system unable to progress (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Many are reluctant to disclose that they are a refugee or asylum seekers or are afraid to do so and consequently do not access support (Stevenson and Willott, 2007).

Regier, Goossen, DiGiuseppe and Campey’s (2005) Canadian study also found that for those aspiring to post secondary, some post-secondary institutions have different English requirements for newcomers who have not had the requisite years in a Canadian high school. Although for Canadian born students it is enough to have completed high school English, newcomer students are required to complete ESL programs at the university or college or to write external proficiency examinations which require sophisticated language skills not expected of Canadian-born students even if they would have passed the local high school English. This differential requirement may further marginalize new refugee/immigrant students especially those who come as older students and are already struggling with language issues.

Lack of support is another significant factor. Some refugee youth felt there was little encouragement to support the aspirations of young refugees and asylum seekers to attend post-secondary education (Earnest et al., 2010). Youth in post-secondary education may also have problems balancing parenting, work and academic responsibilities (Magro, 2007). This was described as of concern since many at this stage of life do not have support from the families and may not have role models outside the families. Participants also expressed the need for preparatory or bridging classes to familiarize themselves with the language, culture and the disciplines before beginning studies (Joyce et al., 2010).
Some of the youth fear isolation in a higher education environment that does not reflect their religious and cultural beliefs and they fear that they find new teaching methods too difficult (Earnest et al., 2010). Many refugees and refugee claimants are also unaware of their rights and entitlements and they received conflicting information from education providers, who are themselves not clear (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Additionally, while educational planners may be more successful in reducing situational or institutional barriers to learning, psychological barriers such as fear, low self-esteem and negative attitudes toward education are the most difficult to change (Magro, 2007).

For refugee claimants, their status may block them from higher education either because they do not qualify for financial assistance or, in the UK study, the insecurity over their right to remain (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Some refugee claimants in Toronto also felt that while they want to go to universities, colleges, they did not have the documentation to enable access to resources because the government has a policy of making them wait for years (Shields, Rahi and Scholtz, 2006). The difference with the USA, though not universal, is that undocumented youth can access financial support in some states. The states of California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin allow for in-state tuition. The Federal attempt to address the differences has been the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. This would make undocumented youth eligible to work, drive, secure federal work study and student loans and states will not be restricted from providing own financial aid (National Immigration Law Centre, 2010). However they will not be eligible for Pell, a federal grant for low income undergraduate and some post baccalaureate students to promote access to post-secondary. The Bill is currently in limbo owing to a Republican filibuster. In Texas, the forerunner in granting in-state tuition, state Republicans want to repeal current provisions by barring in-state tuition, setting tuition rate at the highest a given college offers and requiring proof of legal residence in the USA (Daly, 2011). While some states are progressive, there are efforts to roll back the provisions that had enabled access.

The studies indicate that refugee students have aspirations but need more supports. Some of the barriers post-secondary students face mirror the challenges faced by high school youth. The common barriers in these studies are language barriers, lack of support and information, funding concerns and changes in instructional methods as major challenges.

2.3. English/French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL) and English Literacy Development (ELD)

Lack of official language competency has been identified as the biggest challenge. Evidence suggests that a high level of academic language competency in the dominant language is a predictor for successful educational outcomes. Students who enter the system have to receive instruction as English/French language learners (ELLs and FLLs). Many of the studies reviewed were for English and suggest that the level of language competency may determine whether a student completes school, the extent of success and the learning track.

Changes in the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act mean more newcomers with limited or no literacy skills and who have often been through trauma situations are being enrolled in the system. Studies on language proficiency conclude that host/official language competency, both oral and academic, also affects students’ abilities to detect social nuances in the school setting (Areepattamannil and Freeman, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin, 2009).

Gunderson (2008) in comparing ESL or English-language learner (ELL) outcomes in Canada and the USA argues that the label is problematic because it masks significant underlying differences and also has many negative features associated with it. Challenging the practice of placing ESL students in a silo, Gunderson (2008) argues that some ESL students have never learned to read in their first language or attended school prior to immigrating, others have attended school and have learned to read some English and yet others have learned to read and have studied advanced academic subjects in their first languages.
Gunderson (2008) concludes that both the curriculum and teachers are unprepared to teach to these differences the consequence being that schools with higher percentages of ESL students had higher ESL disappearance rates and lower grades in academic classes. Youth in the OCASI (2009) survey feel that the system operates as if everyone has the same language level. Kappel Ramji Consulting Group (2007) also criticize the absence of federal benchmarks for language instruction and assessment.

Toohey and Derwing’s (2008) paper from an evaluation of ESL programs across Canada indicated that there was a relatively high ESL dropout rates from academic subject courses and a decline in support for ESL. The study indicated that 88% of responding Manitoba schools were reporting limited literacy skills as a challenge for refugee students and in the Vancouver BC study of 24, 890 students, there was a particularly high rate of disappearance of students from low-income families from academic courses that would lead to post-secondary education (PSE) and in some cases dropping out of school altogether. The methodology involved a review of findings from existing studies and studying data from 1, 554 Grades 10-12 ESL students from 1997-2002 and an in-depth study of two west end (professional and upper middle class-independent immigrants) and two east end (mainly working class-family class and refugee immigrants) Vancouver secondary schools where ESL students were enrolled. Findings from the Vancouver study were that 60% of the ESL students graduated high school but those that come into it at high school were less likely to master both language and content curriculum. Most of the students from the family and refugees classes steered away from language heavy courses towards courses with strong visuals or hands on component. However, the school in the low income area with equivalent graduating rate as the more affluent placed more emphasis on technical/professional use of English.

Funding cuts have had a negative effect on refugee students’ language acquisition. Anderson (2011) summarized emerging findings from a study by Ruben Gaztambide-Fenandez and Cristina Guerrero with sixty Spanish-speaking students from six high schools across Toronto to get their perspectives on their schooling experiences and academic engagement. The students are aware of the necessity for a good education and mastering English. However, the fallout from cutbacks in the 1990’ is that school boards have been left with less money for ESL instruction (Anderson, 2011). Half of the schools have ESL students with some reporting an ESL/ELD population of over 90% (People for Education, 2009). Despite this, only a third has ESL teachers (People for Education, 2008). The result has been multilevel or composite classes meaning that some students are inappropriately placed in classes that do not meet their skill levels. While some more proficient youth welcome helping to support the lower level learners, students sometimes feel frustrated with the work in multi-level ESL classes because it is either too difficult for the less proficient students or too easy for the more advanced students (Soto-Gordon, 2010). Students at a higher level of proficiency may feel neglected and consequently disengage if, in an effort to practice differentiated instruction, teachers pay too much attention to students with lower level proficiency to the detriment of those at a higher level (Soto-Gordon, 2010).

Bascuñán (2009) pointed to a reluctance to fund ESL (English as a Second Language), ELD (English Literacy Development) and International Languages (IL) within the TDSB and there is evidence of misuse of funds. Van Ngo (2009) analyzed how three school boards, Toronto District School Board, Calgary Board of Education, and Vancouver School Board, have responded to ESL needs of their learners. Ontario provided more funds for ESL and to students of low socio-economic status compared to Alberta and British Columbia according to the funding formula (Li, 2010). Even with this increase, People for Education point to a disconnect between what is given and what is needed. Additionally, the Ontario Ministry of Education does not differentiate funding for students who have had no education or have experienced disrupted learning. Their policy also does not mandate that ESL funding should be spent on ESL instruction (People for Education, 2008). The result has been a multi-level funding diversion. Van Ngo (2009) citing a People for Education (2006) report pointed out that the TDSB had misdirected ESL funding, spending only about $35 million of the $80 million of ESL funding for 2005/2006 on ESL programs and using the rest to cover costs such as teachers’ salaries and benefits and
maintenance of infrastructure (Van Ngo, 2009). Soto-Gordon (2010) concurs, pointing to a further diversion at school levels with no system of checks and balances to ensure that English language learners receive adequate funding. People for Education reported from their survey that some schools were placing ESL students in special classes because of lack of resources (People for Education, 2010).

Similar cases of fund diversion are evident in other Canadian studies. As part of a survey of 68 ESL students from four Calgary and Edmonton School Boards in Alberta, Coalition for Equal Access to Education (2009) reported that although $300 million dollars had been released in 2007-2008 for language instruction including extra for refugees and students from low economic status, the money was not used explicitly for ESL. Many schools used in-class support from teachers without ESL training and only 11% of students had self-contained ESL classes. Students in Edmonton Public School Board also reported schools stopped providing instruction when their levels of reading, writing and speaking were still very poor, poor or average (Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2008).

Furthermore, since ESL is the predominant consideration, this may also mean little attention is paid to ELD. ESL is for students with educational experience whereas ELD is for those who have not developed literacy skills in their first language because of limited access to schooling or who come from communities where Standard English is the official language but where other varieties of English are in common use (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001, 2007). The funding is provided as a lump sum for both though the distinction would necessitate differentiated funding and instruction approaches especially for refugee youth who have no or disrupted formal education. Some schools were reported to have ESL but no ELD programs (Regier, Goossen, DiGiuseppe and Campey, 2005). Bond et al. (2007) mapped key elements of teaching practice at education sites offering programs to secondary school and post-secondary refugee youth in Melbourne, Australia against social determinants of health and suggested program modifications. They added that some refugee youth faced difficulties in acquiring the second language if they were not literate in their first language because they lack the skills to transfer to L2 acquisition.

An added funding issue relates to the length of time it takes of five to seven years for students to reach academic and cognitive language proficiency, known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), versus the funding that is available for students who have been in Ontario which stops at four years (Devjee, 2008; Soto Gordon, 2010). The cap means some students do not benefit fully.

Ferfolja and Vickers (2010) also discussed the ineffectiveness of English proficiency learning program for Australian refugee youth. Refugees of high-school age in Australian schools are assisted initially through Intensive English Centres (IECs), to transition from IECs to mainstream classrooms. Due to limited human and fiscal resources some refugees are made to transition from these specialised classes to mainstream education with only a rudimentary grasp of English (Ferfolja and Vickers, 2010) thus setting them up for failure. A California study found exceptionally high dropout rates for English learners in secondary schools the critical issue being lack of motivation with learners twice as likely to drop out of high school as all other students because of the lack of appropriate courses, feelings of isolation and lack of belonging and frustration with falling behind academically (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly and Rumberger, 2008). However, the Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2008) in Australia which has targeted funding for ESL initiatives, program officers who work with schools offering the programs and professional development to build capacities and to maintain a network for teachers and multicultural education aides who work one on one with students in class and are a link between refugee families and schools. The youth’s academic and social environments are therefore linked through the language support program although there is no discussion on the impact of this approach.

For the francophone students, the issues of language are the same in some ways but there are elements unique to the francophone context. Though Toronto is predominantly English speaking, some students in Toronto attend French Immersion schools which are in the minority as francophones constitute 4.8% of
Ontario’s population. The study by Cote, Boissonneault, Michaud, Tremblay and Allaire (2008) on francophone youth disengagement from high schools used data from the Early School Leavers Study to examine student disengagement among Ontario’s francophone students. Their findings are that the proportion of Ontarians with L1 French, mostly located in urban areas, has decreased making it hard to maintain the language in a predominantly English-speaking environment. At the time of writing, educational achievements for francophone youth 15 years and older in Ontario were lower than the general population although in central Ontario they graduated at a high rate than the general provincial population. They observed four groups of students whom they classified as dropouts, tuneouts, pushouts and the cultural dropouts. The cultural dropouts are a uniquely francophone school phenomenon where students drop from the French language system to engage the English language system to complete high school in the belief that it offers more educational opportunities and due to a high level of disenchantment with the school curriculum which students felt was principally designed with university in mind. Being in a minority situation also meant there is less support and less chances of communicating in one’s language.

Other complementary studies on language instruction argue that the push for host language fluency may negatively impact educational outcomes. “At-risk” or vulnerable students, a term often used for students of a refugee background, are placed at even greater risk when their languages, identities and cultures are not validated or, worse, trivialized (Musetti, Salas and Perez, 2009). McBrien’s (2005) research on the needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States of America reviewed existing literature limited to the USA and argues that the push for English fluency is usually accompanied by a loss of home language use, fluency, and development. Their L1 should be regarded as an important component of their identity, a useful tool for thinking and learning and a valuable medium for effective communication in the family and the community (Guo, 2006) and encouraging L1 use allows students to develop second language proficiency without undue pressure (Loewen, 2004). When the children lose their original home language in a home environment where the carers lack fluency in the host language, this may cause intergenerational tension and compromise protective supports from parents and carers (McAndrew, 2009).

The result of reduced funding is negative outcomes for the students. The lack of targeted funding and accountability weakens provision of specialized programming needed to support the education of refugee students. Robert Sweet’s Toronto Site summary of findings in the pan-Canadian Council on Learning report (McAndrew, 2009) found that ESL instruction for non-English speakers was negatively associated with graduation suggesting that such assistance is not seen as sufficient and effective. A Canadian Coalition for Immigrant Children and Youth report indicates that ESL students have lower academic performance although this problem is often masked by high performance in other subjects like math and sciences among immigrant students from China, Taiwan and Korea (Anderson, 2011). The level of official language proficiency has implications for placement in that some refugee children are placed in special education classes and others in low academic tracks despite high capabilities; a process described by Gibson and Carrasco (2009) as downward tracking and which compromises the aspirations of refugee youth. This was also the finding in Rutter’s (2006) UK study that as refugee students found lessons inaccessible because of language barriers compounded by inadequate EAL support, they were labelled as having learning difficulties and place in special education streams. The Robert Sweet Toronto Site finding in Canadian Council on Learning report is that those taking a majority of courses in the Academic program of study were on track to graduate versus much more at risk Applied and Essential courses (McAndrew, 2009). The dropout rate of those in the Basic or Essential stream of study leading directly to the workplace was thrice that of the majority of students who were in the Academic stream which lead to university (64% versus 21%) (McAndrew, 2009). For the older youth, linguistic fluency affects the chances of successful integration especially at the end of the first decade of settlement but those most in need are least likely to get the support to achieve this (Beiser, 2009) because much of the current programming is to support either language or workplace integration but not both (Wilkinson, Lauer, Sin, Ka Tat Tsang and Yan, 2010).
The issue of accent differences has not been given much consideration in studies. However, in the Feuerverger and Richards’ (2007) study some newly arrived refugee and immigrant students in a Toronto inner city school where over 40 languages were spoken felt that accent differences impaired their ability to accrue social rewards both in schools and the community. Some felt themselves intellectually stigmatized because of lack of proficiency and saw this as an enduring liability (Feuerverger and Richards, 2007). In the OCASI (2009) survey some youth felt their grade placement was based on their accents or pronunciations rather than their language level. The impact of accent discrimination merits exploring.

The responses to this constellation of factors that present challenges to their educational success are some may drop out or display maladaptive behaviour. In a Soroor and Popal (2005) study involving 211 Toronto Afghan youth aged 12-18 who completed questionnaires, 3 parent focus group sessions with 82 parents and information from 16 service provider representatives, the number of youth who reported adjustment struggles was significant with nearly 21%, suspended/expelled for fighting. However, the majority of Afghan youth reported getting along well with their parents (63%) and siblings (68%) and having friends (93%). This study is also limited to the Afghan refugee students’ context. Whether it is inadequate funding leading to inadequate staffing or composite classes, fast tracking that prioritises budgetary considerations or misuse of funding, the result is a questionable preparedness of the students and increased chances of disengagement.

3. Other Determinants of Educational Success

3.1 Age at Arrival

A number of studies concur that age at arrival determines the rate of assimilation and also the educational outcomes of late arrival or older new immigrant student (Baffoe, 2006; Anisef, Brown, Phythian, Sweet and Walters, 2008, Bedri et al, 2009; McAndrew, 2009). The Ontario Education guide that students should have accumulate 16 credits by 16 years, means that refugee students who come at an older age and/or who suffered disrupted learning are at risk of not completing high school.

Older refugee youth have limited time to learn the language and understand the learning environment impeding their capacity to take full advantage of the education and training. McAndrew’s (2009) Canadian Council on Learning Report’s qualitative study on the educational and learning outcomes of first and second generation students in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver observed in Jacques Ledent’s Montréal Site Report (McAndrew, 2009) that having entered the Quebec school system in Secondaire 1 and having changed schools negatively affected students.

In Baffoe’s (2006) ethnographic study of the social and educational experiences of immigrant and refugee youth from minority backgrounds in the first year of contact with the Quebec educational system, youth who arrived in the mid-teens (14-16) experienced transitioning difficulties. In Quebec at 16 they had to transition to Adult High school where they had to learn with students sometimes their parents’ age making it difficult for them to engage. The practice of age-based placement means refugee students may also be frustrated from being too old to study at grade level while they are functioning at lower levels academically (Kanu, 2008, Yohani, 2010) or frustration at being with students either too young or too old as in the Quebec study (Baffoe, 2006). This suggests an alternative placement approach is needed.

The age cap means students may also have to move out of regular school before they are ready (Baffoe, 2006) and some students may leave without completing (Devjee, 2008). In the Devjee (2008) study, Alberta education was planning a Knowledge and Employability program to offer English and some core courses at a lower level as well as work experience with the expectation that refugee youth will graduate into lower level employment and then upgrade. Upgrading is expensive, time consuming and more difficult to accomplish as an adult with increased responsibilities (Devjee, 2008).
Older refugee youth who reunify with parents in a staggered migration process may face reunification challenges making it harder for them to adapt (Hare, 2007) both to the school and general social environment.

### 3.2 Gender
There is no agreement on whether educational outcomes of refugee youth are gendered. Beiser (2009) in The Ryerson University Refugee Resettlement Project and Jiwani, Janovicek and Cameron (2001) concluded that young male refugees were the most likely to learn English during the first year or two in Canada with females at a linguistic disadvantage. Despite pre-migration disadvantages, once in the system, females outperform males and boys are at greater risk of dropping out (Trypuc and Heller, 2008; McAndrew, 2009). Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel and Martin (2009) conclude that immigrant boys tend to have fewer meaningful relationships with their teachers and perceive their school environments less supportive and are more likely to drop out (Trypuc and Heller, 2008). The Toronto School Board Achievement Gap Task Force Draft Report (2010) also attests to the nuanced gender experiences of post-immigration experiences of youth in high school.

The McBrien (2009) study on the educational experiences of refugee girls found that despite obstacles, they were doing well partly due the mutual support from a shared experience of being refugees and also out of empathy for their parent’ struggles which motivates them to do well so that they would not feel they migrated in vain. On the other hand, the Rutter (2006) study shows no gender differences in Somali and Congolese student outcomes.

In post-secondary, females face extra challenges to complete studies as they have bigger household roles to fulfil before they apply themselves to studies. However, being a female is also predicative of aspiring for higher education as reflected in the educational outcomes of female high school students (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori and Silvagni, 2010). These are also the findings in Omar’s (2009) study of Somali youth where he interviewed 24 high school students and 24 parents in Melbourne, Australia, to infer the educational and employment aspirations of high school students. Females interviewed had higher aspirations than the males and there was agreement that more female Somali students gained entrance into university into the course of their first or second preference than males. Given the relative disadvantage shown in the UNHCR (2009) and Buscher (2010) reports, it is of interest to explore what is promoting and supporting the success of female refugee youth and the extent of that success.

### 3.3. Family
Addressing the needs of the family is crucial in addressing the needs of the youth and family members’ belief in the value of education are key in reinforcing the importance of staying in school (Sersli, Salazar, Lozano, 2010). The experience of being new and sometimes the length of time it takes for refugee families to access services, secure economic independence, find adequate and decent housing and form supportive networks presents challenges.

Family structure, and in particular, where there is little parental supervision or lack of parental modeling due to the physical or emotional absence of one or both parents, is often cited as a risk factor (Sersli, Salazar, Lozano, 2010). An explanation for parental absence is the preoccupation with economic survival with parents having to juggle multiple, often low paying jobs. In other families, one or both parents may be away for extended periods of time for work (Sersli, Salazar, Lozano, 2010). The effect of this is that parents may not be home to supervise their children, or have little time/energy left to support their emotional and social and educational needs even if they have the skills. Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) conclude from the Alberta study that parents may be unable to monitor the children’s learning not out of disinterest but due to work.
Some studies point to the unrealistic expectations by parents and some refugee youth about the time, skills and pathways necessary to achieve goals which create pressure on the youth and may result in truancy from school or withdrawal (Dooley, 2009; Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2007). Additionally, the families may have little knowledge of career opportunities or the range of tertiary training and post-school training (Bond et al., 2007).

Differential integration also creates a perceived loss of control or the dependence of parents on the children to navigate systems on settlement. The children’s ability to integrate faster and speak the host language better means that refugee youth are sometimes relied upon to translate, conduct different forms of transactions etc. This may affect their school attendance (OCASI, 2009). The role reversal and change in power dynamics may create inter-generational tension (McBrien, 2005). The perceived undermining of parents’ beliefs about parenting and authority and their own integration and survival challenges may leave them ill-equipped to provide the support needed by their children to succeed in school (Kanu, 2008). Studies indicate parent-child conflict has a negative effect on academic achievement and significantly decreases the students' grade point average, educational aspirations, and academic expectations (Dinh et al., 2009).

Some youth arrive without caring adults. In Kanu’s (2008) study many students reported living on their own having lost parents and coming as unaccompanied minors, others living in reconstituted families mostly of friends they made in refugee camps. The lack of support from family means some have to cope with difficult situations on their own. In the Chirkov and Geres (2009) Saskatoon study where they interviewed 8 unaccompanied African refugee youth, they found that though they were devoted learners, their academic success was relatively low compared to students from African families where there were parents.

### 3.4 Race and Ethnicity

Refugee youth report real and perceived discrimination from staff and students as a barrier. Beiser (2009) in The Ryerson University Refugee Resettlement Project, a decade-long study of 1,348 Southeast Asian (SEA) refugees brought to Vancouver, Canada, between 1979 and 1981 and the Heidi Ellis, MacDonald, Klunk-Gillis, Lincoln and Cabral (2008) study which examined relations between trauma exposure, post-resettlement stressors, perceived discrimination, and mental health symptoms in 135 English speaking Somali adolescent refugee boys and girls aged 11-20 who have resettled in the U.S.A. conclude that discrimination negatively impacts especially adolescent students at a point where there is increased awareness about their identity.

In Hospital for Sick Kids (2005) youth discussed the negative school climate that alienated newcomers and other ethnoculturally-distinct youth often through classism, discrimination, racism, negative stereotypes, school cliques, presence of gangs, and ethnic balkanization. Carranza (2009) investigating why Spanish speaking students are failing also identified racism as one cause of school dropout for Spanish speaking students in the TDSB. Racism may be overt to the extent in which teachers and other school staff may be obvious in their attitudes or may manifest covertly as indifference reflected in the use of labeling and/or negative stereotypes masked by indifference (Carranza, 2009).

Racialized students are especially pressured to adopt the mostly host culture values in school and social settings while at home they are to keep their ethnic values and may feel the tensions between home and school (Trypuc and Heller, 2008). The pressure on students to adopt host culture values results in bi-cultural tension with some refugee youth either over-identifying with their culture of origin or with the host culture or becoming marginalised from both (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Conflicts over dual identities may leave youth feeling frustrated and confused and can lead to poor performance at school (OCASI, 2009).
The racism and discrimination either excludes them from the educational experience or youth no longer trust the system to provide a conducive learning environment (Riley and Ungerleider, 2008) and therefore drop out or become hidden dropouts characterised by irregular school attendance (Rosenblum, Goldblatt and Moin, 2008). While the TDSB states that systemic racism continues to erect barriers to the full realization of students’ potential for success, they acknowledge that antiracist education as an aspect of equity in education has not been given adequate focus in professional development and that the impact of racism may go unrecognized and unaddressed (TDSB, 2010).

3.5 Employment and Economic Wellbeing
Twined with education is quality employment which offers another opportunity for integration and upward mobility in Canada. Studies have indicated that refugee youth are experiencing labour market due to language barriers, discrimination, and weak social networks and for some mental health issues. This causes financial challenges which may compromise their educational outcomes.

Wilkinson (2008) examined the labour market transitions of immigrant-born, refugee born and Canadian born youth using two data sets, the 1998 Survey on Labour and Income Dynamics and the 1988 Refugee Resettlement to Alberta Survey both of which focused on youth between 15 and 24. She discussed subtle differences between refugees and immigrants in that the former are less likely to know English or French pre-arrival and may have experienced trauma which negatively impacts their employability. The survey showed that youth aged 20 to 24 were more likely to be engaged in employment although their employment rates were lower compared to the Canadian and immigrant born groups. Of the refugee group, males, nonstudents, those with more years of education but fewer years in Canada and those from regions in South–east Asia and the Middle East were more likely to find work. This suggests a racialization of employment which marginalizes some sectors or the refugee more than others.

A 2008 survey by Access Alliance found that 70% of the refugee clients were unemployed three years after arrival in Canada. The parents’ economic situation has a bearing on the educational experiences and outcomes of youth from a refugee background as it may add pressure on them to contribute to the family income. Hospital for Sick Kids (2005) concluded that the low socio-economic status of refugee parents may necessitate that refugee youth take on jobs while in school. Francis (2010) findings were that though education is a core value, the pressure to contribute to family finances may mean refugee youth cannot take advantage of the support programs that are available. It also leaves little time to attend to the rigours of the schoolwork. Additionally, when they see their parents struggle with poverty, some feel they have to help by dropping out of school (Francis, 2010). Kanu’s (2008) study shows some youth working eight hour jobs daily and this contributes to poor academic performance and frustration. The Chirkov and Geres (2009) Saskatoon study found that the need to work created classroom problems such as sleeping in class, attendance problems and incomplete homework. Youth who work part or full time were perceived to make slower academic progress (Rossiter and Rossiter, 2009). Students may also choose less appealing academic paths if there is promise of a job, even low-paying, sacrificing academic achievement for economic security (Anderson, 2011).

Financial concerns, fear of debt and poverty are cited as the principal barriers inhibiting access to higher education. Francis’ (2010) study shows that youth from low-income households feel under pressure to contribute to family finances. GAR youth who are at the post-secondary stage are reluctant to add to the family debt by taking large student debt in the form of loans especially when their families owe money from the travel loans (Francis, 2010). For GARS the requirement to pay back the travel loans is a significant burden due to the short amortization period and the expectation for GARS to begin repaying 12 months after landing in Canada (Sherrell and Immigrant Services Society of BC, 2009). The Chuang (2010) Canadian study with 125 newcomer youth on settlement challenges for immigrant youth including refugees also indicated financial problems as a challenge and compound difficulties of balancing school, work and family. However the study does not rank employment very high for school going youth though
they indicated financial problems for the family (Chuang, 2010). Stevenson and Willott (2007) found that educational support needs of refugees tend to be subsumed within the general programs for underachieving groups though they argue that the unemployment rate for refugees is far above the national average in the UK compared with other ethnic minority workers. Refugees who intended to study had to choose between full or part-time courses, neither of which was satisfactory (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Magro (2007) also indicated financial hardships due to a loss of professional standing.

A Joyce, Earnest, de Mori and Silvagni (2010) Australian study involved eleven in-depth semi-structured interviews with six male and five female participants from Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Liberia and Eritrea; eight aged over 25 and three under 25 prompted by the fact that the majority of refugees arriving in Australia are aged between 16 and 35 and some are embarking on university education but there are very few studies on their experience of tertiary education. The study indicated that transnational obligations also mean that some students worked part time or during university holiday times to provide for themselves, those they live with and to send money back to their families and relatives (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori and Silvagni, 2010) which affects the study time.

The study by Shields et al. (2006) examined the lived labour market experience of immigrant and refugee (IR) youth who had been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. The study defined youth or young adults as 18 to 29 year olds because these are typically the years in contemporary Canadian society when young people first attempt to establish themselves in their careers and work life. The data collection methodology was eight semi-structured focus group discussions with participants from immigrant and refugee service agencies, ethno-cultural organizations, employment centres providing services to IR youth and visible-minority immigrants and refugee youth within the Greater Toronto area from diverse regions. The youth felt they possessed the attributes they believed employers want in employees However, they believed Canadian employers they encountered had been mainly unprepared to suitably employ them. The constant sentiment appeared to be one of frustration among those youth from poorer, sometimes war-torn (Shields et al., 2006).

Being a non-status refugee presents barriers to accessing employment. Refugee youth cited the Canadian immigration process as a major barrier to employment and felt disadvantaged by a process which can hold their fate in limbo for many years and prevent them from working (Shields et al, 2006).

Shakya, Khanlou and Gonsalves (2010) found in their study of new immigrant Afghan, Colombian, Sudanese, and Tamil youth in Toronto in the 14 -18 age range that though education and employment may be strategies for integration and social mobility, refugees pointed to barriers of financial pressure and discrimination. All those interviewed by Francis (2010) confirmed that under and unemployment is a barrier while the main pressure was the urgent need to pay rent and bills. They point to language, demands for Canadian experience and weak social networks as key barriers. There were sentiments that some employers often extremely exploitative and abused undocumented people.

Over time underemployment or lack of it can lead to a loss of confidence in the youth’s abilities, which can have long-term, detrimental effects on both their successful integration into society and their ability to secure meaningful permanent employment (Shields et al, 2006). Wilkinson (2008) added the perennial conclusion that more research is needed as available data is inadequate to interpret the meaning behind the numbers.

3.6 Housing

Some literature indicates that the housing situation of refugees has an impact on children’s learning outcomes. Clancy (2007) points to dislocation caused when refugees move from reception houses to various cities and neighbourhoods in search of cheaper houses or opportunities stating that this unsettlement follows the children into the school system. The children always feel new and this causes
vulnerability and ruptures friendships and a sense of community both of which are important in aiding children’s school transitions.

Carter, Polevychok, Friesen and Osborne (2008) state that there is a disconnect between housing and settlement policy despite the fact that housing is viewed by many experts as a reliable predictor of integration. This gap sometimes leaves refugees to fend for themselves in an expensive housing market. A number of studies show barriers to adequate, appropriate and affordable housing especially in the big cities. The Community Forum Summary (2003) surveyed 300 Latin American and Muslim communities in West Central Toronto focussed on refugees as a high risk group and their experiences of living in invisible homelessness and found that only 10 percent of refugee were accessing formal housing. This was reiterated in Murdie’s (2005) Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada with a focus on Toronto using Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) special analysis of the 1996 and 2001 censuses which concluded that refugees compared to the other immigrants faced bigger challenge as they had few resources and limited prospects for access to quality jobs. Carter et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study using a literature review, focus group interviews with refugees, market analysis and personal interviews with 75 households in the first and 55 in the second of a two-year study in Winnipeg. Those in subsidised houses were relatively better off as the ones in private houses paid more than 30 % of income for rent but that the level of support to sponsored refugees is inadequate to cover other needs (Carter et al., 2008). The majority still resided in the more affordable inner cities; areas characterized by neighbourhood decline and where they had safety concerns. Teixeira (2008) focused on housing experiences of Black African refugees and immigrants in Toronto. The study looked at immigrants from Mozambique and Cape Verde and refugees from Angola. A shortage of subsided Metro Houses meant refugees also had to go into the private rental market.

A Sherrrell (2009) led study on the housing needs of refugees and an examination of current supports focussed mainly on recent GARs who have been observed to have greater needs because of low literacy levels, significant physical and mental health challenges, increased numbers of single parent families and larger than Canadian average households compared with previous cohorts pre-2002. Key findings for this Surrey, BC, study were that apart from affordability challenges there is also evidence of overcrowding. Residential mobility, contrary to other studies, was low because of the need to live near family/friends or amenities but some felt trapped by the low income, lack of knowledge and language barriers. Even with PSRs, there may be problems if there is a sponsorship breakdown (Francis, 2010).

The literature shows some links between housing challenges and educational struggles. The difficulty of finding suitable accommodation means youth live in housing where it is difficult to study and do homework due to a lack of separate space or ideal room (OCASI, 2009). Rummens et al.’s (2008) qualitative study on 57 youth in Ontario traced the trajectory of student disengagement and found that the need to live in less expensive housing could also translate into long commutes for the youth and less time for school work. The impact of the housing challenges is that families are forced to decide between rent and other basic needs such as food and clothing (Rossiter and Rossiter, 2009). Students and families in disadvantaged neighbourhoods struggle with survival issues: poor nutrition, family unemployment, low family income, health issues, youth conflict, limited opportunities for recreation and in these circumstances, school is a challenge (TDSB, 2010).

3.7 Sexual Orientation

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth appear to have negative experiences of the educational system. Phase One of a study on their school experiences surveyed almost 1700 students from across Canada through individual online participation and in-school sessions in four school boards. The findings were that a great deal of verbal and physical homophobic and transphobic harassment occurs in Canadian schools (Taylor et al., 2008).
The Youth Migration Project (YMP) assessed the needs of LGBTQ youth with 90 youth aged 16-25 from twenty two countries including immigrant, refugee and non-status youth who migrated to Toronto to escape war, violence, political repression, escape homophobia in families and religious institutions and to find safe LGBTQ communities. The findings were that some youth avoided their cultural communities, often leading double lives. Some of the youth migrated to escape persecution but still felt lonely, depressed and a profound sense of loss (Travers and Abualsameed, 2009). Whereas other youth appear to draw strength from their communities to cope with their challenges, LGBTQ youth are not always assured of this. 51% said they had been verbally harassed over their sexual orientation and more than a fifth of LGBTQ respondents said they had been physically bullied (McQuigge, 2010) in school. Three-quarters of LGBTQ students and 95% of transgender students felt unsafe at school and over a quarter of LGBTQ students and almost half of transgender students reported skipping school because they felt unsafe (Taylor et al., 2008). Sexual orientation may therefore impact educational outcomes.

4. Relationship with Mental Health

A large body of literature explores the protective and risk factors that influence the educational outcomes of refugee youth. From a mental health perspective, school is the place where issues of mental wellness can be supported. However, mental health has not been a priority for professional development and less than half of secondary schools have regularly scheduled access to either psychologists or child and youth workers and just under two-thirds report any scheduled access to a social worker (People for Education, 2010). Studies lack consensus on how it affects the educational outcomes. The variables that mediate their educational outcomes can be classified within a framework of the chronological experience of the youth from a refugee background’s pre-, trans- and post-migration factors.

Lustig, et al. (2003) summarized pre-migration risk factors that may precipitate stress as including: limited access to schools which disrupts education and social development, facing threats to their safety and/or of family members at the family and individual levels, sometimes anticipating and then coping with devastating events where youth may witness or engage in or engage in violence, insufficient food and for some youth front-line combat that puts child soldiers at risk for rape, torture, war injuries, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation and sometimes problems with respecting authority figures (Lustig, et al., 2003).

Trans-migration stressors included those induced by delays in the process, errors in the processing, delays in family unification, lack of information and not having much input in deciding the place of settlement in Canada (Wilson, Murtaza and Shakya, 2010). Other trans-migration stressors, according to Lustig, et al. (2004), may include uncertainty about the future, separation from caregivers by accident and for youth without caretakers: lack of identifiable guardians, extensive travel without adult supervision, and being forced to negotiate the legal system without an adult to advocate for their rights placing them at greater risk for psychiatric symptoms following trauma including PTSD.

Post-migration stressors include the challenge to adjustment in a host country with new language, belief systems, values and mores (Lustig, et al., 2003).

Some studies challenge the deficit lens through which most of the refugee youth tend to be viewed arguing that refugee youth display much resilience that can be capitalized on. This comes from personal attributes and protective factors in their environment. Some findings indicate that the majority of youth arrive with a set of positive resources for successfully negotiating the settlement challenges beyond the resettlement period, adjust well (Correa-Velez et al., 2010) and are participating successfully in the Canadian educational system. In some areas like Mathematics they outperform locally born youth (Stermae, Elgic, Dunlap and Kelly, 2010) if they have previous learning experiences. While some refugees did have traumatic stress symptoms, their functioning was not usually reduced by these symptoms as observed in a Tankink and Richter’s (2007) study which included Sudanese refugee girls.
Matthews’ (2008) Australian study also criticized current research approaches for its over-emphasis on trauma effects of refugee experiences with little research on the school and settlement experiences.

Rousseau and Drapeau (2003) conducted a cross-sectional longitudinal study of 57 Cambodian refugee youth and 67 Quebec born youth living in Montreal from 1993 to 1998. They found that although the Cambodian born youth were living in harsher economic conditions than their Quebec born peers, had been exposed to hardships, experienced pre-migration trauma and had been uprooted, their academic outcomes were not significantly different from their peers and their social adjustment was satisfactory (Rousseau and Drapeau, 2003). Without minimizing the suffering, they concluded that most children who have suffered trauma adjust well later. They ascribed this to the community’s collective strength. Admittedly the study was limited to Cambodian youth and cannot be generalized.

Kanu (2008) lists the individual resiliencies including maturity and self-reliance as well as faith and their aspirations to use new opportunities in Canada that newcomer/refugee youth draw on to succeed despite obstacles. A sense of accomplishment and respect for education are important individual factors that help keep youth engaged in school (Rossiter and Rossiter, 2009). The Carter et al. (2009) study also makes the same findings in a survey of 85 Southern Sudanese youth who responded to and participated in semi-structured and open-ended interviews. The youth indicated their value for education when they compared their pre-migration deprivation. They also have a strong of responsibility for those left at home and feel they have to succeed.

Positive self esteem is an important protective factor. Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) in their study emphasized the agency of displaced refugee youth. Youth also felt increased opportunities and recognized their newfound freedom from political violence but were also aware of some of the limits to their freedom and opportunity. A Somali female participant in San Diego discussed the quadruple marginalization she experienced as a female, ethnic, religious and a linguistic minority. The IDPs in Altos de Cazuca felt the pain and stigma of being treated poorly because of their displacement condition and a sense of exclusion. The study concluded that despite the dominant portrayal of refugees as victims in the media, the youth saw themselves as capable actors in their new worlds Guerrero and Tinkler (2010). Rutter’s (2006) study on Southern refugee found that the youth from this group performed comparably or better than the average British born students and ascribes this to their distinct identity and strong cultural capital which helped them resist negative acculturation.

Strong family or adults with pseudo-kinship ties and/or ethnic or racial ties can be protective factors as refugee youth who maintain ties with members of the ethnic communities appear more protected (Clark-Karzak, 2010). Refugee children living in camps or poor neighbourhoods in Mexico identified parents and relatives as their primary supports during difficult times, followed by friends or caregivers. In Kanji, (2009) the community’s brotherhood concept means care and support is not limited to the core family but also extended family members, friends and the rest of the members of the Ismaili community. Lustig et al. (2003) cites a conclusion by Eisenbruch (1991b) that Indochinese refugee adolescents resettled in the United States with ethnic foster families were significantly less depressed and had higher grade point averages than those in foster care with non-ethnic families or in group homes. The importance of ethnic ties is evident in the Luster, Qin, Bates, Rana and Ah Lee’s (2010) study of the Sudanese Lost Boys placed with foster parents in the USA. Despite having been exposed to high levels of trauma prior to migration, the community support and a special program created for the youths that focused on keeping the Sudanese culture were factors in aiding their adaption. Immigrants and refugees typically look for friends and for social support among people from their own ethnic background indicating that ethnic communities are social resources to be mobilized to support mental wellness (Correa-Velez, et al. 2010; Beiser, 2009). However, the parents’ physical and/or psychological distress can also have a strong negative effect on children’s well-being (Lustig, et al., 2003).
Another important protective factor is the support refugee youth get from friends (Shakya et al., 2010; Beiser, 2009; Soroor and Popal, 2005). Friends can be accessed without the adults knowing especially when the youth felt they did not want to burden the parents or fear not being understood. In fact participants in the Heidi Ellis et al.’s (2010) study indicated friends as the first to be approached followed by school counselors, family, religious leaders and then other service providers. Mental health professionals were not seen as acceptable sources of help but school counselors were.

Faith is protective factor of significance. In circumstances of trauma and loss, religion plays a central role. Kanji (2009) examined the protective factors for seven Shia Afghan youth from a refugee background in Edmonton, Alberta, who had entered Canada through Pakistan and had resided in Canada for at least two years. In Kanji (2009) the jamatkhana or prayer space is a location for support. Heidi Ellis et al. (2010) in their community participatory research with 144 Somali adolescents aged 12 and 19, who were born outside the US and had been living in the US for at least one year and their caregivers, found that culture and religion may play a particularly prominent role in determining both the perception of mental illness and ensuring pathways to healing. Religious leaders may be viewed as trusted helpers and are more readily accessed than other helpers (Heidi Ellis et al., 2010).

On the other hand, Rutter’s (2006) study of Somali youth, found that two out of eight youth were not functioning well at school with their behaviour described as unpredictable and often aggressive. Some of these findings are similar to those in a British Columbia Ministry of Education (2009) guide to working with refugee students. The American Psychological Association (APA) Task force (2010) summarised research findings on educational impacts. These include elevated symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, sleep problems, behavioral problems but that good family and peer relations and emotional expression reduce symptoms. PTSD may affect concentration and attention while the challenge of learning new things may add to distress. The British Columbia guide to working with refugee students listed some triggers that may have detrimental effects on students including: dark halls, sound of boot-like footsteps, bells, uniformed police being stared at or situations that may seem out of control like hosing around (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009). Chirkov and Geres’ (2009) found that PTSD and learning disabilities are hard to diagnose. Their study also indicated trauma especially in unaccompanied African youth and that though they are devoted learners, the success rate is low.

Ethno-racial identity may work as a risk factor. The findings from the Kumsa (2006) study are that the racialized policies in Canada disproportionately disadvantage some ethno-racial refugee groups. The qualitative research study with 18 participant youth born in Ethiopia or in refugee camps in Somalia and who came to Canada as children uniting with families or as unaccompanied refugees who trace their ancestry back to Oromos of Ethiopia concluded that race matters as African refugees see themselves as particularly disadvantaged (Kumsa, 2006). This is echoed in Urquhart, Jimeno and Lau (2008) case studies and focus group interviews of economic and social marginalization of Chinese, Lebanese and Somali communities of Ottawa to discern the attitudes on marginalization. The Lebanese group identified Islamophobia as a barrier while the Somali perceived a double jeopardy in both Islamophobia and their Blackness being factors in their experience of everyday marginalization. The Heidi Ellis et al. (2008) study concluded that there is a strong relationship between discrimination and poorer mental health outcomes among minority youth.

McBrien (2005) also states that distress and economic struggles endured by adults have repercussions for refugee children in terms of emotional difficulties and school-related issues. Parents’ labour markets difficulties were identified as a key cause of depression, sadness and family tensions (Shakya et al., 2010). Though privately sponsored refugees may get more supports than GARS, some are at greater risk of depression from subtle psychological pressure due to intrusiveness from the sponsors and some would prefer government sponsorship (Beiser, 2009). Lustig, et al. (2003) in different cited studies show a
correlation of a mother’s lack of emotional well-being (Almqvist and Broberg, 1999) and family negativity (Garbarino and Kostelny, 1996) with increases in refugee children’s stress.

Some youth may also suffer cultural bereavement defined as responses to losing touch with attributes of their homelands (Lustig, et al., 2003) as they experience cultural dissonance in the host society. Tempany (2009) in a review of literature on the issue of the mental health and wellbeing of Sudanese refugees, cited a Simich, Hamilton and Baya (2006) study that higher psychological distress was associated with discrepancies between expectations of life and actual experiences in Canada. Clancy’s (2007) study with Sudanese youth found some yearning to go back to Sudan because of their feeling of being out of place and the fact that they missed the support system that they felt had been available.

The conclusion is that although their mental health challenges should not be minimized, neither should they be exaggerated with extreme portraits, as these youth are not just passive victims but active survivors (Rousseau and Drapeau, 2003). However, Anderson (2004) cautions that even resilient refugee youth may be overwhelmed by circumstances where they lack the resources to cope. Resilience appears domain specific and coping in one situation may not translate to coping in all situations (Anderson, 2004).

5. Recommendations in the Findings
The literature also included useful recommendations. Kanu (2008) summarized the following recommendations from refugee students which they felt would aid their success in education: an adjustment to the curriculum pace, patience from the teachers, extended language programs, less racism, culturally appropriate sport and recreation programs, access to psychological counseling, and making the school more welcoming for diverse students. They also appealed to the federal government to waiver the resettlement loans and to recognize their parents’ prior learning so that they could be gainfully employed. This would decrease the economic and psychological stress.

McNeely, Stretcher and Bates (2010) in a study to determine key components of comprehensive school linked mental health programs for refugee and immigrant children in USA schools recommended a mental health service which has family engagement at the core and provides for family needs twined with support from cultural brokers to provide emotional and behavioural supports. Rousseau and Guzder (2008) recommended ecologic models of intervention that insists on parent-school interactions to understand cultural differences, classroom activities that use youth’s experiences as learning opportunities, training of teachers to be able to assist youth and preventative programs such as expressive arts and school based-clinical services as secondary intervention. Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) recommended flexible programs for studies and compiling data on evidence based protective programs.

Conclusion
Refugee youth appear invisible in the Toronto educational system. There is no systematic collection of data on status. There is no tracking of educational outcomes specifically for refugee youth. As they are subsumed into the broader immigrant student category, the positive educational outcomes of the broader group may mask the challenges that some refugee youth may be facing. This has created a situation where refugee students are rarely targeted with specific policies. This is the finding in Canada regarding ESL (Regier et al., 2005) and Australia (Sidhu and Taylor, 2007) in their study of how the federal and state governments manage the education of refugee children which concluded that their education is left to chance with no national framework but devolution to states, communities and individual schools.

Pressé and Thomson (2007) also flagged that need indicators from the refugees’ pre-migration experiences have been lacking yet they could be used to inform provision especially for specialized supports. Also absent is research on refugee youth who potentially experience learning disabilities or live with physical disabilities despite the fact that Canada accepts refugees with disabilities.
The majority of students from the qualitative studies appear determined to stay in the system despite their struggles. None in the Kanu (2008) study were considering dropping out and aspired to be professionals on leaving school despite their struggles. Shakya et al. (2011) in a study with 8 refugee youth aged 16 to 24, all of who are from protracted refugee situations from Afghanistan, Burma and Sudan, found that their educational aspirations have strengthened after coming to Canada compared to pre-migration experience of limited opportunities. Their perception was that education leads to better opportunities as it is an essential requirement to secure jobs. Nevertheless, the aspirations were undermined by post-settlement challenges such as systemic barriers and discrimination, multiple family responsibilities, linguistic barriers, grade misplacement and non-recognition of prior learning and financial barriers.

The heterogeneity of newcomer refugees and diversity of family resources and settlement experiences translates to differences in opportunities and constraints (Rummens et al., 2008). The successes or failures of the students appear dependent on where students/families settle, the attitudes of the host community, the school environment and the students’ or families’ own set of coping mechanisms. The literature largely does not discuss what indicators of success are and there are not many studies that have tracked the trajectory of the students using measurable indicators. Many of the studies are ethnospecific so findings cannot be generalized. Research also tends to focus on refugee youth who are in school and may not capture experiences of those who dropped out due to challenges they experienced. Commenting on the lack of qualitative research, Canadian Council on Learning Report (2009) reiterated the necessity for research in its conclusion of the study on the experiences of students in Toronto, stating that the voices of immigrant youth and the current institutional responses represent a call for detailed investigation.

**Research Directions**

1. Researching the educational experiences refugee youth and how it impacts their mental health is challenging because of the interplay of factors. There is an imperative for a Toronto study because of a gas in knowledge. Areas for further exploration may also include: the credit accumulation rate of refugee students; grade averages, academic placement of refugee youth and outcomes vs. aspirations; the nature of school experiences for refugee girls; the impact of disabilities on educational outcomes among refugee youth living with disabilities and experiences of refugee youth in post-secondary education.

2. Because the experiences are not just an event and given the diversity of refugee youth experiences, there is need for both cross sectional and a longitudinal studies that explore the trajectory of the refugee youth experiences in the educational settings.

3. The research must utilize a wide range of methodologies to identify and understand variations in successes and challenges in educational settings with the nexus of mental health wellbeing and stresses.
References


Bedri, Z., Chatterjee, S. & Cortez, R. (2009). *High school credential assessment program: Valuing students from all backgrounds.* York University students research project on immigrant and refugee youth issues carried out as part of the OCASI Serving Youth in Newcomer Communities (SYNC) Project.


Kappel Ramji Consulting Group (2007). *A national approach to meeting the needs of GAR children and youth within the settlement assistance program: Final report.*


---

According to SCF, only five donor countries (Canada, Denmark, Japan, Norway and Sweden) explicitly consider education to be an integral part of their humanitarian policy.