

Families with Refugee Backgrounds Rebuilding New Lives in Saskatchewan



What this research is about

A lower cost of living, more employment opportunities, and better quality of life are encouraging more refugees to settle in smaller, mid-sized cities instead of large urban centres. Migration to another country brings its own challenges. Certain personal traits and supports can help refugees become socially and economically successful. This study examined what characteristics and external supports contributed to the resilience of refugees who had settled in Regina, Saskatchewan.

What the researchers did

The researchers conducted three focus groups with a total of 15 participants. The participants were recruited through the Regina Open Door Society, a federal government agency serving refugees, as well as through word of mouth. Participants had to be over 18, with a refugee background or status, and living in Regina for at least five years. They also had to be working or have a partner who worked. Participants were required to have enough English language skills to participate.

The first focus group consisted of two men and two women. The second group also consisted of two men and two women, while the last group had seven women. Each focus group lasted one to two hours. Data from the focus groups were transcribed verbatim, reviewed, and analyzed. The researchers developed a coding framework to identify codes and emerging themes. Key themes were then developed based on the coding.

What the researchers found

The analysis showed that there were four key themes that contributed to resilience:

1. Personal qualities

Personal traits of determination, perseverance, and courage were highlighted by the participants as essential

What you need to know

Refugees face many barriers when resettling in a new country. In smaller cities, there may be better job opportunities and quality of life, but not as many external supports. Resilience is a complex process of adapting and overcoming hardship in life. This study examined what contributed to 15 refugees' resilience after resettling in Regina, a mid-sized city in Saskatchewan.

Four themes emerged from the focus groups: personal qualities, external resources and supports, social networks, and the challenge of "starting over" in employment and education. Determination, perseverance, and courage were seen as essential personal traits. Settlement agencies, government programs, and educational institutions were important first sources of support. Developing relationships with Canadians and others from their own culture fostered a sense of belonging. Gaining Canadian credentials and work experience was deemed achievable through hard work, determination, and perseverance.

in how they overcame adversities. Other traits like patience, confidence, and the ability to work cooperatively with others were also seen as important. These qualities were not only fostered and shaped by the participants' experiences with life events such as war and living in refugee camps, but also by their past and current relationships.

2. External resources and supports

The first sources of support for the participants were settlement agencies, government programs, and educational institutions. Settlement agencies helped

with basic needs like shelter, financial information, and how to access medical and other services. Government programs helped find employment or obtain the necessary education. Libraries were seen as public spaces to not only self-educate but also to use free computer access for schoolwork. However, external supports available to refugees in smaller cities might not be comparable to those in large urban centres. Moreover, some participants stated that they found it difficult to find information on what services and resources were available to them.

3. Social networks

Having relationships with Canadians or others from their own culture or background was seen by the participants as important. Churches and religious groups in particular were important sources of social networking, spiritual, and emotional support. Finding new ways of developing relationships, such as playing team sports, was also seen as helpful to engage with others and build relationships in the community. However, some participants felt they faced barriers to forming relationships, such as language difficulties.

4. The challenge of “starting over” in education and employment

Educational credentials from outside of Canada are often not formally recognized. This means refugees need to gain Canadian credentials, despite the qualifications they had obtained in their home country. This is a major barrier for many refugees to finding employment, which is fundamental to achieving economic independence. Another barrier is the need for Canadian work experience. Participants mentioned having to take on jobs well below their qualifications to earn an income. Willingness to study hard, perseverance, and determination were deemed necessary to overcome these obstacles. Although they sometimes faced racism and discrimination, participants believed that they could succeed if they worked hard. Support from family members also enabled them to attend school and hold a job.

How you can use this research

Settlement agencies could support the ongoing integration of refugees in smaller and mid-sized

communities. Policies could be implemented to ensure equitable access to services and resources.

About the researchers

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The Vanier Institute of the Family has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots.

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