![Western Centre for School Mental Health logo]

Research Snapshot

Helping newcomer youth adjust to life in Canada: Conceptualizing program design

What is this research about?

Canadian schools include many newcomer immigrant and refugee youth. Many of these newcomer students experience stress relating to their immigration journeys and struggle with adapting to a new culture. Canadian schools want to provide programs to support newcomers as they adjust to their new home. However, very few evidence-based programs address the needs of newcomer youth, and rarely have such programs been evaluated in Canada.

In this study, researchers explored experts' suggestions for school-based programs to help newcomer youth build on their strengths to adjust to life in Canada.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers used a Group Concept Mapping (GCM) approach to gather ideas about developing, implementing, and evaluating a school-based mental health program for newcomer youth. GCM is a mixed methods approach that illustrates participants' ideas in a concept map. In this approach, stakeholders share their ideas by responding to a focus prompt, then sort all the shared ideas into groups. The researchers apply statistical analyses to create a map of the ideas that stakeholders conceptualized.

Study participants included 23 stakeholders involved in the STRONG resilience program for newcomer youth. Participants were mostly school mental health clinicians (54%) and program developers (24%). Other participants included STRONG developers, evaluators, and trainers.

Highlights

- This study identified key concepts to consider when developing and implementing school-based programs for newcomer youth.
- Key considerations include:
  - student needs (e.g., addressing unique clinical issues)
  - system supports (e.g., taking a whole school approach and engaging family and community), and
  - program design (e.g., considering group composition and setting, and making materials accessible and age-appropriate).

Using a Group Concept Mapping Approach

First, stakeholders responded to the prompt: "Please list any important considerations you can think of for designing, implementing, and facilitating programs to promote resilience among newcomer children and youth."
Then, researchers compiled all the ideas into one list and gave the list of ideas back to stakeholders.
Next, individual stakeholders sorted the ideas into groups, in a way that made sense to them. They also assigned a label to each group of ideas.
Finally, the researchers created a concept map to illustrate the relationships among all the ideas. Researchers identified five concepts in the map that identify five key areas to consider when developing and implementing programs for newcomer youth.

About the STRONG Program
STRONG is a group-based resilience program for newcomer youth. STRONG consists of 10 group sessions and one individual session. Find out more about STRONG at
www.strongforschools.com
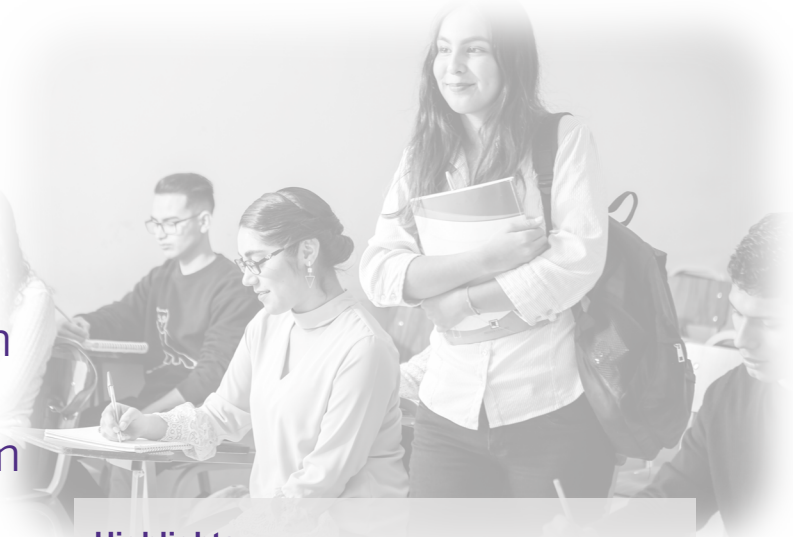
Main Findings

The stakeholders in this study identified the following five important considerations about designing, implementing, and facilitating psychosocial programs with newcomer youth.

Engaging Family and Community

- Build strong relationships with families and communities to support youth recruitment and engagement
- Include youth voice and perspective

Take a Whole School Approach

- Collaborate with teachers and clinicians within schools
- Educate teachers about the new program before implementing it
- Give time for buy-in from school staff, families, and youth

Attend to Group Composition and Setting

- Select appropriate youth for the program
- Consider appropriate time, setting, and space for the delivery of the program
- Avoid delivering a program during special cultural events (e.g., Ramadan)

Make Material Accessible and Age-Appropriate

- Present the material in clear language
- Keep the material age-appropriate
- Ensure that the program is culturally sensitive and gender-inclusive

Address Unique Clinical Issues

- Consider youths' unique needs and challenges, especially regarding trauma and geopolitical issues
- Ensure that the material and examples are culturally sensitive
- Be mindful of youths' survivor guilt and acculturative stressors

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For more information about Western's Centre for School Mental Health, visit
www.csmh.uwo.ca

How can you use this research?

This study explored stakeholders' expertise about developing and implementing school-based mental health programs for newcomer youth.

To be effective, school-based interventions with newcomer youth must consider individual, school, and system levels aspects of program delivery. School and program leaders can maximise the success of school-based programs for newcomers by considering these aspects.

Five key aspects include (a) engaging family and the community, (b) taking a whole school approach, (c) attending to group composition, (d) making materials accessible, and (e) addressing individual issues.

Original Research Article

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Crooks, C. V., Smith, A. C. G., Robinson-Link, N., Orenstein, S., & Hoover, S. (2020). Psychosocial interventions in schools with newcomers: A structured conceptualization of system, design, and individual needs. *Children and Youth Services Review, 112,* 104894.

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About this Summary: This summary was written by Nataliya Kubishyn, PhD Student at Western University.