



Research Snapshot

Supporting Newcomer Youth with Healthy Relationships Programming

What is this research about and why is it important?

There is a need for more research that considers the perspectives and lived experiences of Newcomer youth, how they adjust, and factors that support their coping. Research with Newcomer youth has predominantly been deficit-focused, and with Canada's population of Newcomer youth continuing to grow, it is critical to learn from and devote attention to the resilience factors that support their well-being and adjustment, not only the challenges they face.

This research aimed to engage Newcomer youth to center their voices, learn from their experiences, and inform efforts to support their well-being that are more culturally appropriate and sensitive to their needs.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers conducted three studies, where they:

Study 1: Asked Newcomer youth to share their coping strategies, challenges, and advice for recently arrived Newcomers to Canada.

Study 2: Asked Newcomer youth to identify strategies and considerations for programming that aims to support Newcomer youth and promote well-being.

Study 3: Explored the acceptability of the Healthy Relationships Program–Enhanced (HRP-E) with youth at Newcomer-serving organizations in Canada.

KEY POINTS

- Newcomer youth who participated in this research discussed resilience strategies, such as maintaining a connection with home culture and religion, accessing community supports, and building language proficiency.
- Newcomer youth participants shared their lived experiences to brainstorm and identify what activities, topics, and skills would be helpful in programming for other Newcomer youth.
- HRP–E is an evidence-informed healthy relationships and violence prevention program for youth aged 14 to 21.
- Findings suggest that HRP–E is promising in its acceptability and fit with Newcomer youth, as facilitators and youth participants enjoyed the program and felt the content was relatable to youths' experiences.

How can you use this research?

Through this research, Newcomer youth shared their experiences regarding coping strategies, social and systemic challenges, and community supports, all pointing to the importance of designing and implementing supports for Newcomer youth that meet their unique needs. This research suggests that a component of successful support for Newcomer youth is social connection, including relationships, networks, and social structures.

Overall findings suggest **there is a need for healthy relationships programming for Newcomer youth** and that the Healthy Relationships Program–Enhanced is promising in terms of fit and acceptability.

FIRST STUDY

What did the researchers do?

Researchers conducted exploratory focus groups with Newcomer youth in Ontario to shed light on their perspectives and coping strategies to overcome challenges after relocating to a new country.

In 2019, researchers conducted four focus groups with 37 refugees and immigrants at two Newcomer-serving organizations in Ontario. Study participants were 14 to 22 years old, and most of the youth participants had resided in Canada for less than four years.

Main Findings

Five overarching *themes* were identified within the advice participants shared during the focus groups:

Moving to a new country is hard: Participants acknowledged the challenges associated with moving to a new country and recognized that adjustment can be hard.

Maintain a healthy mindset: Participants encouraged other newcomer youth to have patience, persevere through challenges, and reframe their thinking to grow from the past and look to their future.

Take an active role in the adjustment process: Strategies were shared to help youth embrace their move to a new country, including learning about the country, asking questions, seeking help when unsure, and interacting with Canadians.

Stay true to who you are: Participants wanted other youth to know that their identity is valid and that they should have self-assurance as they form their identity in a new country.

You are not alone: Participants encouraged other Newcomer youth to seek out components of community resilience—including accessing support at Newcomer-serving organizations—and connect with trusted people and supportive resources to reduce feelings of isolation.

SECOND STUDY

What did the researchers do?

Researchers used a mixed-methods approach to examine Newcomer youths' collective insight and identify considerations for developing programming to support Newcomer youths' healthy development.

Newcomers between 14 to 22 years old participated in focus groups to share their ideas about creating programming focused on the relationships and well-being of Newcomer youth. Responses from these focus groups were sorted and ranked by 26 Newcomer youth into thematically similar categories using *group concept mapping*—an approach that helps organize a group's ideas into a visual representation.

Main Findings

Six overarching *concepts* emerged and were ranked in order of importance:

Create a space for sharing: Youth believe it is valuable to have to share their experiences and feelings and talk about how they are managing on a day-to-day basis.

Discuss relational issues: Participants highlighted the importance of discussing topics and issues Newcomer youth may experience in social interactions and relationships.

Teach strategies for adjusting to a new country: Participants suggested teaching strategies related to adjusting to a new culture, social norms, and fitting in.

Teach wellness skills: Participants discussed the need to teach healthy living skills, including activities that teach youth healthy ways to solve problems, minimize stress, and distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Have feel-good activities: Youth believed that programming should include enjoyable, fun activities that can help alleviate stress.

Plan for diversity: Participants emphasized that program facilitators should support diversity and celebrate differences.

THIRD STUDY

What did the researchers do?

Researchers explored the acceptability of the Healthy Relationships Program–Enhanced with newcomer youth at three Newcomer-serving agencies in Ontario and British Columbia.

In a multiple case study design, researchers collected both qualitative and quantitative data from seven program facilitators, three administrators, and 20 Newcomer youth regarding their reactions to the program and how appropriate they perceived it to be.

Main Findings

Overall, the HRP–Enhanced showed good fit and acceptability with Newcomer youth while demonstrating room for improvement. Researchers found that:

The flexibility that HRP–E offers is ideal for Newcomer-serving sites. Facilitators adapted the program with success across all sites, including logistic adaptations (e.g., group composition, session length, online/in person), surface adaptations (e.g., changing language or images), and deep adaptations (e.g., cultural teachings, connecting to youths' experiences).

Relationships are an important component of successful implementation. Recruitment assistance from community supports, pre-established connections within groups, parent buy-in, and co-facilitation helped create trusting and cohesive spaces for youth within the program.

Group composition matters. Diverse group compositions (e.g., wide age range, multiple languages) can complicate decisions around adaptations.

Language supports enhanced youths' experience and their understanding of content. Support included visual supports and modelling for youth, providing translations where possible, and including more explanation for content that was new to youth.

Additional training and consultation would be beneficial. Consultation support for facilitators can strengthen their readiness and confidence to deliver HRP–E with Newcomer youth.

Original Research Articles

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

Smith, A.C.G., Crooks, C.V. & Baker, L. (2023). "You have to be resilient": A qualitative study exploring advice newcomer youth have for other newcomer youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 40, 761–771. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00807-3>

Smith, A.C.G., & Crooks, C.V. (2023). *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 52, 489). Youth-identified considerations for programming to support newcomers' healthy development: A group concept mapping study–507. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-022-09695-9>

Smith, A.C.G., & Crooks, C.V. (2023). Acceptability of a healthy relationships program with newcomer youth: A comparative case study with three newcomer-serving agencies. *Child & Youth Services*, 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2023.2190092>

About the Authors

Alexandra C.G. Smith, Faculty of Education, Western University.

Claire V. Crooks, Professor and Director of the Centre for School Mental Health, Faculty of Education, Western University.

Linda Baker, Faculty of Education, Western University.

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About this Summary: This summary was written by Nikita Kalwani, MA Candidate at Western University.

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