



Research Snapshot

Resilience program for newcomer youth improves relationships, connectedness, and coping

What is this research about?

There has been an increase in the number of newcomer youth in schools in Canada, in part due to the federal government's response to the crisis in Syria. Newcomer youth have many strengths such as supportive families, connection to their communities, and experiences that bolster their resilience. During their migration journey, newcomer youth often face stressors and traumatic experiences that place them at a greater risk of developing mental health difficulties, particularly, if their psychosocial needs are not addressed post-migration. Mental health supports need to be culturally meaningful and relevant, and address both immediate needs and traumatic history if they are to be effective for newcomer youth. Schools are well positioned to deliver interventions given their accessibility within communities, and having trained mental health professionals available. The goals of this study were to investigate newcomer youths' perceived benefits and acceptability of STRONG, a resilience and mental health promotion intervention.

What did the researchers do?

Data were collected from youth who participated in one of six intervention groups in a school district in Southern Ontario. Groups were facilitated by two mental health clinicians, or a clinician and another school professional such as a settlement worker. Youth participants ranged from 11 to 20 years old. STRONG has a total of 10 group sessions, and one individual session. The program combines a cognitive-behavioural approach, strengths-based activities, and narrative approaches. STRONG focuses on resilience building, increasing

What you need to know:

This study examined the perceived benefits and acceptability of a resilience intervention for newcomer youth. Researchers found that youth reported greater coping skills, and youth reported increases in connectedness and belonging to their peers in the group. Youth also enjoyed the group and would recommend it to their peers.

knowledge and awareness of distress, and developing cognitive-behavioural skills (e.g. improving coping, and relaxation skills). An individual session is included, during which youth share their migration story with the clinician and reflect on their strengths.

In total, 29 youth agreed to participate in the research. Youth completed surveys, a focus group, or both. Participants' countries of origin were diverse and included Syria, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ghana, Philippines, Pakistan, and Rwanda. A significant group of youth participants (28%) migrated from Syria. Surveys consisted of pre- and post-measures of resilience, school climate, and STRONG skills (a survey reflecting each of the core skills taught during the intervention). Youth were invited to participate in a focus group following completion of the intervention to gain an understanding of their perceived benefits, as well as how acceptable the intervention was.

More information about the STRONG intervention is available

at: <https://www.strongforschools.com/>



Benefits of STRONG:

During focus groups, youth expressed numerous benefits including developing new coping strategies, increased self-confidence, better connection to and sense of belonging among peers, sharing and exchanging stories with peers, as well as learning more about the Canadian context. In addition, results from surveys showed that following the intervention, youths' resilience and STRONG skills increased.

"I think the coping skills are the most important. OK, we liked the exercises, we liked the program, but the coping skills is what will stay with you forever. Whenever you are in a stressful situation, you will always remember what to do, and what's the word, and what advice they gave to you on how to handle situations, look at it from a different point of view, and how to make yourself stronger." (Focus group participant).

Youth also appreciated connecting with other youth who had similar experiences and reported that they felt less alone after the program.

Acceptability Findings:

During focus groups, youth were asked to reflect upon their experience of the program, and the researchers found that two broad themes emerged: a high level of acceptability, and suggestions for program improvements.

Youth indicated that they enjoyed the program in terms of the content covered as well as the interactive nature of the activities. For example, youth expressed that "I love or like the exercises."

Overall, youth enjoyed the program and did not have substantive suggestions. When asked specifically for possible improvements, they identified suggestions such as increased language support, a greater variety of games and activities, and making the group available to more peers.

How can you use this research?

The findings from this study provide key insights into youths' perceptions of the STRONG intervention. Both survey and focus group results showed that youth benefited from the intervention and saw increases in their resilience, relationships with peers, and ability to cope. Previous research has shown the potential risk for youth if their social emotional needs are not addressed post-migration. These findings-highlight the importance of providing school based psychosocial interventions for newcomer youth that bolster resilience, promote healthy ways of coping, and increase peer connectedness.

Original Research Article:

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

Crooks, C. V., Kubishyn, N., Syeda, M., & Dare, L. (2020). The STRONG resiliency program for newcomer youth: A mixed-methods exploration of youth experiences and impacts. *International Journal of School Social Work*.

About the Authors:

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

Nataliya Kubishyn, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Maisha Syeda**, Postdoctoral Associate, Centre for School Mental Health, Faculty of Education, Western University. **Lynn Dare**, PhD, program evaluator and consultant.

Keywords: resilience; cognitive-behavioural; refugee; youth

About this Summary: This summary was written by Amira Noyes, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University. For further information about Western's Centre for School Mental Health, visit www.edu.uwo.ca/csmh.