

An Exploration of Integration Journeys, Identity, and Well-Being with Syrian Refugee Youth

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Introduction:

Settlement in a new country exposes refugees to challenges in school, workplaces, homes, and communities. For youth, resettlement can be particularly daunting.



Figure 2:

"In this picture, you can see the sun is far away, and the road is in front of the photo. From my experience, I wanted to arrive at some destinations, but they were far away from me. I kept going until I arrived, and I was still away from the sun. we were going to the beach when I took this picture... So, this photo represents my way and the difficulties that I have experienced till I arrive at where I want which is clear here in the second photo." (Yusra, 21 years old).

Aim:

To explore via photovoice how integration is experienced and navigated in relation to family, peers/friendships, school, work, and community for Syrian refugee youth



Figure 1:

"My experience was like a door that has been opened for me. I had hoped to study, succeed in my life. The door symbolizes paths or ways for the things that I like to do in life. [the interviewer and participants commented on the side the door opens]. It is that I stand in front of the world. The whole world is forward. Look, there are trees, and it is green outside. There are things that give me the hope to keep going. I took this photo when I was 16 years old" (Raghad, 22 years old)

Methods:

Besides Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), the combination of photovoice and narrative methodologies formed the foundation for narrative photovoice methodology (Simmonds et al., 2015). Focus groups and interviews were conducted with 30 Syrian refugee youth.

Themes:

Four themes framed their lived experiences **integration as a chronological journey, bridging or interweaving cultures, managing exclusions, questioning the premise**, all connected by a fifth: **resilience in personal strength and external support**. Together, these themes highlighted integration as a rhythmic process, ultimately fostering resilience amid complex transitions.

Findings:

- There was a clear perception that settlement should be a straightforward journey of consistent progress: becoming more integrated, becoming more settled, becoming more connected, becoming more Canadian.
- However, For youth, integration is not a simple process from being Syrian to being Canadian. Rather, youth are constantly living both identities together, expressing different forms of those identities in different ways in different social settings. Integration is then a rhythmic experience, with moments of supreme comfort and belonging, shattered by moments of feeling overwhelmingly and hopelessly excluded.
- Some participants spoke to giving up on the idea of integration outside their cultural group. They explained that as long as they were able to survive, perhaps there was no value or purpose in seeking Canadian integration.
- Whether in thriving or in suffering, Syrian youth participants were making the most of their internal and external resources.