

# Structural Factors Associated with Higher Education Access for First-Generation Refugees in Canada: An Agenda for Research

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## Abstract

*Refugees are the least educated migrants upon arrival to Canada. Yet, they invest in Canadian higher education at lower rates than other newcomers. Why might this be? This paper enters this emergent conversation through a review of the Canadian-based empirical literature on the structural factors associated with refugees' tertiary education access. Research indicates that as part of the low-income population, refugees are likely to misperceive the cost and benefits of higher education and be deterred by high tuition costs. Academic preparedness and tracking in high schools also pose additional constraints. The gap in the literature exposes a need for inquiry into the ways in which pre-arrival experiences influence refugees' participation in Canada's post-secondary institutions. The paper concludes by underscoring the need for qualitative research that discerns the lived experiences of refugees outside of the aggregate immigrant grouping typical in education research.*

## Résumé

*À leur arrivée, les réfugiés forment le groupe le moins éduqué des immigrants au Canada. Pourtant, ils investissent dans l'éducation supérieure au pays dans une plus faible proportion que les autres nouveaux arrivants. Pourquoi? Cet article contribue à ce nouveau sujet de discussion au moyen d'une revue de la littérature basée au Canada portant sur les facteurs structurels associés à l'accès des réfugiés à l'éducation supérieure. La recherche révèle qu'à titre de membres de la population à faible revenu, les réfugiés sont plus susceptibles d'avoir une perception erronée des coûts et des avantages d'une éducation supérieure et d'en être dissuadés par les droits d'inscription élevés. La préparation et le suivi pédagogiques à l'école secondaire apportent des contraintes supplémentaires. Le manque*

*de littérature sur le sujet met en relief le besoin d'explorer en quoi les expériences pré-immigration influent sur la participation des réfugiés à l'éducation postsecondaire au Canada. L'article se termine par une mise en relief du besoin de recherches qualitatives qui discernent les expériences vécues par les réfugiés sans avoir recours aux regroupements globaux sur l'immigration qui sont typiques des recherches sur l'éducation.*

## Introduction

Immigrant newcomers to Canada do not participate in Canadian higher education at equal rates. Scholars note that it is already highly educated newcomers who are most likely to choose to pursue post-secondary education in their new host country.<sup>1</sup> Refugees, who are the least educated migrants at arrival and are usually unable to return to their country of origin, invest in Canadian post-secondary education at lower rates.<sup>2</sup> *Why might this be?* This paper enters into this emergent conversation through a review of the Canadian-based empirical literature on the structural factors associated with refugees' tertiary education access.

While there is a growing body of knowledge on post-secondary access for native-born Canadians, relatively little is known about refugees' entry into Canada's higher education system.<sup>3</sup> This is partly due to the fact that K-16 school systems across Canada have traditionally not collected data on students' refugee designation.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, knowledge specific to the resettled refugee experience is often lost within the folds of aggregated educational research. However, since refugees' pre-arrival experiences often differ in important ways from those of voluntary immigrants, research that discerns their distinct experiences is warranted.<sup>5</sup> This paper provides a reflective synthesis and analysis on the available scholarship to serve as a precursor for this essential research.

Why should Canada care about refugee's access to higher education? What contextualizing pre-arrival factors need to be considered? What matters for refugees' access to post-secondary education in Canada? In this paper, I investigate these questions within two sections. In the first part of the paper, I articulate the impetus for focusing on refugees' higher education, describe pre-arrival conditions, and outline my theoretical framework. In the second section, I conduct a literature review guided by my research question: *What structural factors are associated with higher education access for first-generation refugees in Canada?* I note points of convergence and divergence and highlight contradictions between theory and evidence. For the purpose of clarity, the literature is synthesized into economic and educational factors. This organizational method was determined after a preliminary review of the scholarship and is done solely for clarity of analysis. I do not mean to suggest that these factors exist in a segmented manner in the real and complicated lives of resettled refugees. Lived experiences are nuanced and influenced by a myriad of factors and conditions that intersect and interact in surprising and complex ways. In essence, if refugees' lives are portraits, then this paper offers a sketch that outlines key structural considerations in thinking about refugees' higher education access.

### ***Why Canada Should Care about the Higher Education of Refugees***

The education of refugees provides both individual and societal benefits. Moreover, understanding and increasing refugees' participation in higher education is a natural extension of Canada's acclaimed humanitarian refugee resettlement efforts.

With limited tertiary education participation, refugees forgo the significant benefits that are part and parcel of higher education—advantages that are particularly robust with the completion of a bachelor degree.<sup>6</sup> Higher education has been found to provide a gateway to upward social and economic mobility by enabling access to high wages, high-quality positions, social networks, and entry into the middle class.<sup>7</sup> The average lifetime earning differential between a Canadian university graduate and a high school graduate is approximately \$1.3 million dollars. A closer look at this figure reveals large income disparities based on field of study. In fact, 18.5 per cent of Canadian university graduates actually earn less than the average Canadian income \$37,002.<sup>8</sup> However, despite this problematic lag, more than 80 per cent of university graduates still earn at or above the average Canadian income. Moreover, individual benefits of higher education extend beyond monetary gains. Persons with bachelor degrees are also more likely to enjoy higher self-esteem, have increased tolerance for

others, enjoy lower child mortality rates, and live longer and healthier lives.<sup>9</sup>

Since an educated citizenry holds important consequences for the nation, increasing access and attainment to post-secondary education for its refugee population must become a policy priority. Educated persons tend to be informed citizens who are more likely to vote and to participate in the political process.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, an educated population is vital to national economic growth through fostering increased tax revenues and providing a skilled workforce able to engage in increasingly globalized knowledge markets.<sup>11</sup> Finally, those with higher levels of education are less likely to burden the social welfare or criminal justice systems.<sup>12</sup>

Understanding and increasing refugees' participation in higher education not only makes economic and civic sense, but is also a natural extension of Canada's acclaimed, albeit increasingly attacked, refugee resettlement efforts.<sup>13</sup> For over thirty years, Canada has been considered a global leader in the resettlement of refugees. Since World War II, Canada has provided protection for an estimated 700,000 refugees.<sup>14</sup> In 2009, with the arrival of 12,500 refugees, Canada was second only to the United States in the number of refugees sponsored for resettlement into a host country.<sup>15</sup> Canada also holds the distinction of being the only country in the world that allows private sponsorship of refugees by organizations and groups of five or more citizens.<sup>16</sup>

The nation's humanitarian endeavours already extend beyond the opening of its doors to offering integration and resettlement programs. Through its Resettlement Assistance Program, Canada offers a welcome at port of entry, housing assistance, and a basic orientation to Canada that focuses primarily on employment guidance and language instruction for adults.<sup>17</sup> There is no official mandate in resettlement efforts to increase newcomers' higher educational access or participation. Since 1996 the policy focus appears to be on attracting already educated immigrants and facilitating foreign-credential recognition rather than engaging newcomers in Canadian higher education.<sup>18</sup>

The lack of an explicit higher education initiative within resettlement services misses an excellent opportunity to assist refugees to become more marketable in the workforce and, perhaps, to be more smoothly integrated thorough interaction with other Canadians in post-secondary institutions.<sup>19</sup> Despite being more highly educated than previous cohorts, recent immigrants to Canada have experienced difficulty successfully incorporating in the labour market.<sup>20</sup> In an effort to explain this troubling trend, researchers and policy experts have pointed to a weak economy, employment discrimination, and the discounting of foreign work experience.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have also identified the non-recognition of

foreign credentials by Canadian employers who “may simply not appreciate or trust the quality of higher education in a country with which they are unfamiliar” as another likely cause.<sup>22</sup> In fact, one-third of immigrants who experienced difficulties finding employment in the four years following arrival reported the rejection of foreign academic qualifications as a contributing factor.<sup>23</sup>

While it is not a panacea, participating in post-secondary education in Canada facilitates entry into the country’s labour force.<sup>24</sup> For instance, in 2007 immigrants with a Canadian university degree had employment rates that equalled Canadian-born counterparts.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, through the process of obtaining their educational credentials in Canada immigrants “have opportunities to interact with native-born students and faculty and gain familiarity with the host society, which may not come so easily to newcomers who do not attend school after arrival.”<sup>26</sup>

Canada claims to have a vested interest in advancing post-secondary education for its populace, as evidenced in its 2002 “Skills and Learning for Canadians” report:

Post-secondary education is already required for most of the new jobs in today’s economy and will be demanded for almost all new jobs in the 21st century. For those without a post-secondary education, employment prospects are dimming rapidly. But post-secondary education is about more than achieving our individual and collective economic potential. It is a means by which we can better understand the world around us, play a more confident role as citizens in a democratic society, and lead more satisfying lives.<sup>27</sup>

In 2010, nearly a decade after these noteworthy sentiments were shared, approximately 50 per cent of the aged twenty-five to sixty-four population had completed tertiary education—making Canada the top-ranked OECD country for educational attainment. However, this is true only when considering all university, college, and polytechnic education.<sup>28</sup> In 2008, Canada’s college graduation rates of 26 per cent were considerably higher than the 10 per cent OECD average. Yet the country’s university graduation rate of 34 per cent was below the average 38 per cent rate for all OECD countries.<sup>29</sup>

This complicated Canadian higher education picture does not offer a clear image of what is happening specifically with refugees. Nonetheless, I argue that as one of the least educated groups in the country, refugees have much to gain from a Canadian higher education. Considering the significant private and public benefits of tertiary education, it is in Canada’s best interest to prioritize refugees’ higher educational access and attainment by including it as part of

a responsible resettlement program for the effective integration of newcomers.

### ***An Emerging Topic: Refugees’ Pre-Arrival Experiences and Higher Education Access***

The only group of immigrants admitted to Canada solely on humanitarian grounds, refugees enter Canada after enduring war, violence, famine, displacement, family separation, and/or persecution.<sup>30</sup> Even after receiving first-country asylum, refugees experience prolonged stress during extended periods of limbo; recent estimates find that refugees spend, on average, an alarming seventeen years in exile before finding a durable solution such as resettlement into a third country.<sup>31</sup> Scholars note this pre-migration experience of refugees is associated with higher incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>32</sup> In addition, as a result of their pre-migration experiences, refugees also face significant disadvantages in schooling compared to other immigrants and Canadian-born persons. Refugee children and youth tend to arrive without formal education experience, with interrupted education due to the outbreak of war or violence, or having undergone inadequate schooling within under-resourced refugee camps.<sup>33</sup> How do these pre-arrival contexts matter for higher education access? Systematic inquiry on how pre-migration conditions intersect with refugees’ access to tertiary education is just beginning to emerge. However, to a limited degree, the institutional practice of tracking (that disproportionately impacts newcomers) and the academic preparedness of refugee students are considered in this paper.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Although Portes and Zhou proposed their seminal segmented assimilation theory to explain the differentiated incorporation patterns of first- and second-generation immigrants in the United States, it allows insight into the integration process of newcomers to Canada.<sup>34</sup> Segmented assimilation theory posits that immigrants may undergo one of three integration paths: upward assimilation, downward assimilation, or selective acculturation. According to the theory, immigrant groups with high human capital (such as higher education credentials) are well received by the host country and tend to follow a path of upward mobility.<sup>35</sup> Other less resourced immigrant groups face the structural barriers of unemployment and living in poor urban neighbourhoods with low-quality schools that lead them to downward mobility. Immigrants who follow the third path of “selective” acculturation maintain their home language and values of the home culture while also successfully adapting into the host country. Rather than following one linear path to integration, segmented assimilation theory

argues that the mobility of first- and second-generation immigrants depends on structural and cultural factors.

While segmented assimilation theory has been widely criticized, in part for ignoring the agency of newcomers and for not providing testable propositions, it illuminates important structural constraints faced by refugees when integrating into host countries.<sup>36</sup> The literature indicates that refugees in Canada are often low-income, settle in urban centres and arrive with limited human capital compared to other immigrants.<sup>37</sup> According to this theory we would expect most refugees to Canada, at least in the initial years, to undergo downward mobility. This negative assimilation pattern may include limited opportunities to participate in tertiary education.

Introduced to explain the low educational outcomes of African-American youth, Ogbu's cultural ecological theory is also helpful in making sense of refugees' experiences in Canadian higher education.<sup>38</sup> This theory posits that differences in the educational success of minorities can be attributed to whether they belong to involuntary or voluntary minority groups. Involuntary minorities who entered the United States by force through being "conquered, colonized or enslaved" are less financially successful and do less well in the education system. On the other hand, voluntary minorities arrive in the country willingly to seek better opportunities. While they may experience initial issues in schools due to cultural and language issues, they are able to overcome them and perform well in the education system.<sup>39</sup>

Ogbu and Simons posit that refugees are semi-voluntary minorities, sharing elements of both voluntary and involuntary groups. Although refugees did not freely choose to settle in the US, they arrive with a positive view of American society and an understanding "that to accomplish the goal of their emigration they would have to learn new, that is white American, ways of behaving and talking."<sup>40</sup> First-generation refugees in Canada are new arrivals and have not endured a long history of institutionalized discrimination. Therefore according to Ogbu and Simons' theory, we would expect them to have a positive view of the dominant society, making them more likely to be strong academic achievers. While several studies lend some support to this theory, the literature indicates that, due to interrupted education and lack of pertinent and timely access to information, not all refugees fare well in the Canadian school system.

Throughout this paper, I will draw on segmented assimilation theory and cultural ecological theory to make sense of the data on refugees' higher education access. The theories serve as points of references against which the empirical evidence will be examined. The conjecture of Portes and Zhou and of Ogbu and Simons will also be reintroduced in

the conclusion as theoretical platforms on which to develop additional research on the topic.

### **Methodology**

This paper outlines economic and academic structural factors associated with post-secondary access for refugees in Canada. In order to identify relevant literature for my review, I used three primary search strategies. The first involved searching academic databases to identify studies on the topic. The second strategy involved searching for studies through governmental and international organization sites such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Amnesty International, Statistics Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the Canadian Council for Refugees. The third strategy made use of reference and bibliographic citations of articles and reports to identify additional literature. To a lesser extent, I also contacted the authors of heavily cited works to request recommendations of additional research in the field.

I restricted the scope of my review to empirical studies written in English on first-generation refugees. I did not exclude refugees by age of entry, gender, country of origin, or settlement city. If certain factors were more salient to one subgroup than another, I identified this in the research synthesis and analysis. Moreover, I drew on studies of non-refugee low-income students to explain the ways in which being part of the low-income group is likely to impact refugees' post-secondary education access.

The research is limited to refugees in the Canadian context. While there is a growing body of research on refugees' access to higher education in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, I decided not to include them in this review. Although these countries are also Western English-speaking refugee resettlement countries, they have widely different immigration policy, historical context, and post-secondary education systems. Finally, undocumented migrants and asylum claimants whose refugee status has not been determined were deemed to be beyond the scope of this review.

Since the 1980s, refugee flows to Canada have increasingly shifted from post-World War II migration from European nations to countries of Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya), the greater Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq), and Asia (Pakistan, China). Thus, since more and more refugees are also visible minorities in Canada, xenophobia is becoming a pressing issue. Findings from Statistics Canada's 2005 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LISC), a large-scale study of 12,000 immigrants who entered the country between October 2000 and September 2001, indicate that newcomers cited facing racism and discrimination within the first four years following arrival.<sup>41</sup> These

issues must be made visible. However, since I was unable to locate any Canadian-based empirical literature examining the role of systematic racism and discrimination in the tertiary education access for refugees, this factor cannot be considered at this time.

When using the terms “higher education,” “post-secondary education,” or “tertiary education,” I am referring to undergraduate degree programs at both colleges and universities in Canada.<sup>42</sup> Although a nuanced study that examines access to these institutions separately is warranted, the literature does not yet allow for a systematic review by tertiary institution type.

I employ the definition of “access” typically used in the literature: “whether a person has at some point been enrolled in post secondary education.”<sup>43</sup> I do not mean “persistence,” a term that means the progression through successive years of education until the completion of studies. While higher education persistence is important, it is another distinctive topic beyond the focus of this paper.

### **Findings**

#### *The Access Consequences of Low Socio-Economic Status*

Recently arrived refugees constitute a segment of Canada’s low-income population.<sup>44</sup> Not only do refugees initially fare worse in the labour market than Canadian-born individuals, but they also earn less and are more likely to be unemployed compared to Skilled Worker Class and Family Class immigrants.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, like other immigrant newcomers, they are increasingly earning less than Canadian-born counterparts; the earnings gap is most pronounced for those with foreign university credentials, reinforcing the growing need for a Canadian degree. Refugees’ high unemployment rates and tendency toward downward occupational mobility lend support to the argument that refugees, at least in the early years, follow a path of downward assimilation.<sup>46</sup>

The literature overwhelming indicates that low-income individuals in Canada are less likely to attend university than their wealthier counterparts.<sup>47</sup> Although the gap in tertiary participation has narrowed between higher- and lower-income families since the 1990s, individuals from higher-income families still attend in greater numbers than those from lower-income families.<sup>48</sup> Canadian scholars have looked at the reasons that limit tertiary education access for low-income students (that, as evidenced, includes refugees).

Usher suggests that low-income individuals’ overestimation of university costs and underestimation of benefits is a barrier that may limit application and access.<sup>49</sup> Rather than making calculated cost-benefit analyses for attending university, Canadian youth have been found to make determinations in rough and imprecise ways that are based on

perceived costs and benefits.<sup>50</sup> Using data from a 2003 survey by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Usher found that levels of misperceptions about university costs and benefits were income related. While Canadians in general overestimated the cost of university tuition by \$1,000, those from low-income backgrounds overestimated by \$3,000. In addition, low-income individuals underestimated the average annual income differential between high school and university graduates. Although the income difference was in fact \$27,191, low-income individuals believed it to be only \$4,885, a greater underestimation than other income groups.<sup>51</sup>

Actual tuition increases also appear to have a negative impact on university attendance for low-income families.<sup>52</sup> This determination was based on a study of the relationship between tuition and attendance by parental income for universities and colleges whose tuitions increased markedly in the 1990s versus those limited by provincial tuition freezes (British Columbia and Quebec). Using multinomial logit modelling, Coelli found a significant negative impact on university attendance rates of youth from low-income backgrounds. However, tuition increases made no impact on other tertiary education options such as college.

In contrast, Frenette found that financial constraints explained little of the university attendance gap between low and high income Canadians.<sup>53</sup> The main finding from the study that used data drawn from the cycles of the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) was that the majority of the gap in university attendance is due to differences in standardized test scores in reading obtained at age fifteen, school marks reported at age fifteen, parental influences, and high-school quality. Frenette suggests that these very factors, however, are indirectly income-related, stating that:

... differences in academic performance across the income distribution may themselves be the result of differences in family income. Families with more financial resources may spend more money on books for children, take their children to museums, spend more on daycare in the early years, locate in neighborhoods with better schools, etc. These actions may result in higher performance on standardized and scholastic tests, and thus, in a higher probability of attending university in the future.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, most refugees belong to the low-income segment of Canada’s population. They face higher levels of unemployment and underemployment compared to other immigrant categories and those born in Canada. Consequently, as part of the low-income population, refugees are likely to misperceive the cost and benefits of higher education and be deterred by high tuition costs.

Portes and Zhou argue that downward assimilation emerges from less welcomed newcomers' residency in poor neighbourhoods with low-quality schools. First, the theory's premise about education quality in high poverty areas should be examined across multiple Canadian contexts to see if it holds true. Students' understanding of the college process and rate of first-generation tertiary education attendees could serve as potential indicators of quality as it relates to tertiary education access. In this instance, a well-designed randomized study that examines higher education information sessions' impact on the higher education entry of refugees would be powerful and informative.

### *Refugees in Canadian Schools*

Academic preparedness and achievement are associated with increased participation in post-secondary education.<sup>55</sup> Since Canada does not utilize standardized tests as part of its admissions requirements, high school grades become the main criteria for entrance into colleges and, in particular, universities. At the same time, with a growing applicant pool for limited spaces, Canadian tertiary institutions are boosting grade requirements, gradually limiting entrance to top students.<sup>56</sup>

Despite refugees' often difficult and limited pre-migration educational experiences, some scholars find that some refugees manage high academic achievements in Canadian schools. A study by Wilkinson provides evidence of refugees' positive academic performance.<sup>57</sup> Using a random sample of ninety-one refugee youth aged fifteen to twenty-one resettled in Alberta from 1992 to 1997, the researcher found that the majority of refugee youth were doing well in the education system, with half of the sample expecting to complete high school and enter post-secondary education. In particular, the study revealed that the factors related to refugees' academic success (defined as being on-track) were being of Yugoslavian origin, having spent more time in Canada, living in a large urban centre, and, to a lesser extent, having healthy parents. Of all these factors, ethnicity had the strongest impact. Unfortunately, due to sample constraints, Wilkinson only provides a basic ethnicity grouping of Yugoslavian and non-Yugoslavian.

Immigrants from war-zone countries—a population closely related to refugees—also exhibit high academic achievement in several subject areas. A recent study by Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, and Kelly on 245 first-generation adolescent immigrant students who had arrived from war-zone countries found these students were doing as well as, and sometimes even surpassing, the academic achievements of Canadian-born students.<sup>58</sup> Immigrant students from war-zone regions performed as well in multiple academic indices including Math, Science, and English.

### *On the Wrong Track*

In contrast to studies that demonstrate refugees' academic achievements, other studies have determined that not all refugees fare as well as Canadian-born students. In a large-scale research study of refugee children in the Toronto District School Board, Kaprielian-Churchill discovered students from Latin America were more likely to be enrolled in basic education tracks.<sup>59</sup> Among refugees who intended to go to university 20 per cent were enrolled in Basic or General programs rather than the Advanced program required for university admissions. By comparison only 5 per cent of Canadian-born students who aspired to university education were in mismatched tracks. Although this study is more than a decade old, it reveals an important incongruence between post-secondary aspiration and having the knowledge about the education system in Canada to realize that aspiration.

Moreover, the authors also find that refugees dropped out at higher rates than the Canadian average. They estimate that the overall drop-out rates for refugees aged nine to eighteen at arrival was in excess of the district's 30 per cent average. While somewhat informative, nine to eighteen is a large age differential, indicating a need for studies that use more meaningful age groupings.

Refugees' academic success lends restrained support to Ogbu and Simons' premise that refugees are semi-voluntary immigrants who are more likely to integrate smoothly into Western educational systems. However, it is clear that not all refugees do well. Refugee students may also not necessarily be enrolled in the appropriate level courses that will allow them to meet their higher education goals. *The important work now is to discern why and when refugees succeed academically and when they do not.* Age at arrival, the interplay of pedagogy and curriculum, and refugees' access to additional educational resources come to mind as important considerations. A study on the conditions in which refugees successfully manage or are challenged in navigating the K-16 educational pipeline would be useful.

### **Conclusion**

This paper identified the economic and academic factors associated with refugees' access in Canadian post-secondary education. The dearth of research indicates the urgency for high-quality research that focuses on this group's challenges, barriers, needs, opportunities, and experiences. While they share similarities, immigrants and refugees differ in several important respects. Educational research on refugees as an exclusive group is absolutely imperative.

Not only do refugees differ from other migrants, but they also differ from each other. Refugees are not a homogeneous population with similar experiences. Their country

of origin, ethnicity, and pre-migration and post-migration experiences vary widely. Therefore, studies that include as many of these dimensions as possible would be beneficial to expanding our understanding and body of knowledge.

Access by higher education institution type is also warranted. There is a wide range of admission criteria at community colleges, technical colleges, colleges, and universities. Consequently, the expectations, opportunities, and barriers for access would also vary.

The existing research on refugees in Canada is largely quantitative, focusing predominantly on economic outcomes and mental health issues.<sup>60</sup> More qualitative work, including work that is epistemological in nature, offers the potential to understand a more complete narrative of refugees' experiences in accessing higher education. Detailed and rigorous qualitative studies that discern the lived experiences of whole persons must be part of a future research agenda.

Moving forward, studies incorporating in-depth interviews, participant observation and ethnography are needed. Longitudinal studies utilizing qualitative and mixed methods are well suited to identify critical higher education access issues that may present themselves at different periods in time. These types of studies would discern how refugees have fared with higher education, and subsequent integration over time, adding a rich texture to the current conversation that, although strong in statistics, lacks sorely in narrative.

The conjectures of the theories used to frame this paper, segmented assimilation theory and cultural ecological theory, can be extended in intriguing ways to inform future studies on higher education among Canadian refugees.

Segmented assimilation theory may be used to structure studies on integration patterns and education outcomes of different generations of refugees. At the University of Toronto, Boyd has already conducted research on the relationship between generation status and educational attainment of Canadian immigrants, finding in part that second-generation immigrants have more years of schooling than the third generation.<sup>61</sup> Studies on first- and second-generation refugees could be used to uncover if their higher education attainment followed a similar pattern. This theory can also be the basis of studies that look at a more nuanced study of refugee generations, such as the 1.5 generation, used to describe those who immigrate before the age of fifteen.

Studies that offer a deep examination of the intersection of refugee status, ethnicity, and educational attainment would be a valuable addition to the literature. Cultural ecological theory's positioning of refugees as semi-voluntary minorities who may not be burdened by a long history of

systematic racism provides a useful grounding to begin this exploration.

The discrepancy between aspiration and educational track allows for space to conduct important work on the trajectory of tertiary participation. It also provides the opportunity to study success by focusing on refugees who met their goals of a higher education. Sampling from refugees in advanced tracks or in post-secondary studies, scholars can examine the supports, people, structure, and elements that were essential for aspiration and attainment to converge. What interventions and supports helped to bridge the gap between refugees' optimistic outlook and cursory knowledge of the Canadian education system?

Refugees' access to higher education holds important implications for both their and Canada's economic and social well-being. With the enduring wars and devastating natural disasters, the number of refugees is expected to increase. It is imperative that resettlement countries understand the challenges that refugees face in accessing tertiary education. Through ongoing rigorous quantitative and qualitative inquiry we can better inform targeted higher-education policy for refugees, arguably one of Canada's and the world's most vulnerable and resilient populations.

#### NOTES

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