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An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing the Success of Refugee Youth in College and University

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FACTORS
INFLUENCING THE SUCCESS OF
REFUGEE YOUTH IN COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN
CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

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Abstract

The educational needs, challenges and outcomes of refugee youth in the United States have been studied a great deal, particularly in regard to primary and secondary education. There is a dearth of research, however, on the refugee experience in higher education in the United States.

This study seeks to add to the body of literature on refugee education by exploring shared features of the refugee experience in higher education. Through an in-depth study of refugee youth in Chicago, the study seeks to understand their experiences before, while entering and during college and university, particularly how these experiences are tied to their refugee identities.

The study highlights the many loci of support for young refugees, as well as the lack of significant support from ethnic communities and family members. It also highlights the significant challenges that refugees face once in college.

The study also presents implications for further research, as well as for policy and practice. It highlights the need for policy makers and refugee service providers to focus on providing tailored support to refugees once in college and university.

Statement of Problem

Refugee youth encounter a number of challenges upon arrival in the United States, stemming from a variety of sources. They face linguistic and cultural barriers, histories of trauma, changing family dynamic and unfamiliarity navigating systems in a new land. These youth also encounter numerous educational barriers, stemming from factors such as interrupted schooling, differing school norms and teaching styles and lack of English language proficiency.

While there is research on the immigrant experience in higher education in the United States (Suarez Orozco & Suarez Orozco, 2001), immigrant and refugees' experiences in primary and secondary education in the United States (Mosselson, 2002, McBrien, 2005) and refugee experiences in higher education in Australia and the United Kingdom (Gateley, 2013, Hannah, 1999), there is a gap in research in refugee experiences in higher education in the United States. As numbers of refugees continue to climb in the United States, it is important to examine how these new residents transition to higher education, as well as the barriers and successes once engaged in colleges and universities.

In light of this, this study seeks to understand the experiences of young refugees in college and university and seeks to answer the following question. What is the experience of refugee youth as they transition to higher education in the United States?

Are there shared features of this experience? What role do refugee communities and support systems play in this transition? How does the refugee resettlement experience impact a young person once he/she is enrolled in college?

Key Definitions

While many similarities exist between refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers, there are several key differences.

A *refugee* is defined as “a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country” (UNHCR, 1951). Refugees flee their homelands, often living in refugee camps or urban environments in neighboring countries until they are able to return to their countries of origin, build a new life in a country of secondary settlement or be resettled to a third country.

Immigrants are persons who decide to leave their home countries to move to another one. This may occur for any number of reasons, such as employment, economic security, family or religious freedom.

Asylum seekers are individuals who are outside of their country of origin, but due to fear of persecution, are unable to return. These individuals apply for asylum and must go through a legal process in order to be granted the right to remain in the country where they currently reside. Each country has different standards and processes for asylum, but the process takes years during which asylum seekers have very limited access to financial or other assistance.

In addition to the terms above, there are several other key terms related to refugees, resettlement and higher education that will be used in this paper.

According to the United States High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), *resettlement* is described as “the selection and transfer of refugees from a state in which they have sought protection to a third state that has agreed to admit them—as refugees—with permanent residence

status.”

Third country refers to the tertiary country of residence of refugees. The first country is the refugee’s home country, and the second is the country to which the refugee fled post-conflict.

Resettlement Agency refers to the entity responsible for receiving and providing assistance to the refugee. In the United States, there are nine national resettlement agencies, each with affiliates throughout the country. Resettlement agencies provide financial assistance, along with services related to housing, education, employment and case management.

Background on Refugee Resettlement in the United States

The United States has a long history of receiving those fleeing from persecution and conflict. In the wake of the second World War, the United States admitted 250,000 Europeans who had been displaced by the war (Singer and Wilson, 2007). Throughout the 50s and 60s, displaced persons from Communist nations continued to arrive in the United States. In the mid-70s, with the Vietnam war, the United States established the Indochinese Refugee Task Force, which led to the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese in the United States (Singer and Wilson, 2007).

Refugee policy in the United States was firmly established with the Refugee Act of 1980, which standardized the refugee resettlement program, set standards for refugee admissions and paved the way for the current day Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration as well as the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The standards and policies established by the Refugee Act are still largely in place today.

For refugees ultimately resettled to the United States, their road starts in their secondary country of settlement, the place to which they have fled following conflict. In order to be deemed a refugee, a group or individual must be accorded refugee status through UNHCR. According to

UNHCR, there are three durable solutions for refugees: repatriation, settlement to a secondary country and third country resettlement. The most desirable of these solutions is repatriation, where refugees are eventually able to return to their home country. The next most desirable solution is settlement to a secondary country, where language and culture are often similar to the refugee's country of origin. The least desirable durable solution is resettlement. In fact, less than one percent of the world's refugees are resettled to a third country.

For refugees for whom third country resettlement is an option, UNHCR refers cases to resettling countries. The United States is historically the country that resettles the largest number of refugees, with approximately 85,000 refugees being resettled in fiscal year 2016 (Refugee Processing Center, 2017). Refugees admitted to the United States do so through the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), which is part of the US State Department. PRM is the entity responsible for the placement of refugees in the United States, as well as the administration of initial core services. These core services are provided through the Reception and Placement program, a program that lasts for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 90 days.

In order to deliver Reception and Placement services, PRM contracts with nine resettlement agencies which, in turn, have affiliates located throughout the nation. These affiliates are ultimately responsible for securing housing, welcoming refugees at the airport, and providing financial assistance, as well as core services. These core services include assisting refugees in accessing public benefits, applying for a social security card, cultural orientation, and referrals to service providers who can provide ESL classes and other ongoing assistance.

The federal government also houses the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which administers additional programming to assist refugees. These programs include Matching Grant,

Preferred Communities and Refugee Social Services. ORR describe the Matching Grant program as “an alternative to public cash assistance providing services to enable ORR-eligible populations to become economically self-sufficient within 120 to 180 days of program eligibility” (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). The program employs a fast-track employment model whereby refugees are expected to move into employment shortly after arrival in the United States. The Preferred Communities program provides intensive case management services to vulnerable populations. Refugee Social Services programs fund state refugee employment programs, as well as the K–12 services program, that provides academic and case management assistance to school-aged refugees. ORR also administers programs for foreign born survivors of trafficking and unaccompanied immigrant youth, as well as grants to ethnic community based organizations who often provide assistance after resettlement agencies.

The majority of ORR-funded programs provide assistance for approximately two years, although some programs last for up to five years.

Chicago’s Refugee Resettlement Context

Chicago is one of the United States’ key metropolitan areas for refugee resettlement (Singer and Wilson, 2007).

The state of Illinois has admitted 1600 refugees in fiscal year 2017, which accounts for 3.17% of the nations’ refugee arrivals (Refugee Processing Center, 2017). The majority of these refugees resettled in Illinois are placed in Chicago.

Many of these populations are relatively new to Chicago, thus there if no established community and little community-based support for newly arriving refugees. Unlike immigrants, who often join established communities, refugees are often arriving with few individuals from their own communities to help them adjust to life in new land (Singer & Wilson, 2006).

Refugees arriving in Chicago are provided initial resettlement services from one of six agencies: Catholic Charities of Chicago, the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago, Heartland Human Care Services, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Refugee One and World Relief Chicago. Refugee resettlement agencies provide assistance for at least the first 30 days that a refugee family is in the United States. These agencies often offer supplemental programs to provide longer term assistance, such as case management, English language training, and employment training and placement (Singer & Wilson, 2006). In addition, four of the six resettlement agencies receive funding through the Office of Refugee Resettlement to operate a K–12 case management program, which assists youth and families in navigating the school system and offers academic assistance to school aged youth. Many agencies also offer support supplemental after school programming, in home tutoring, and summer programs.

Although resettlement agencies offer academic assistance during primary and secondary school, there is a dearth of assistance in helping refugees navigate the higher education system. Currently, the Office of Refugee Resettlement does not fund any programs that directly provide assistance with accessing or succeeding in higher education.

Review of Research Literature

Refugee youth have been the focus of several studies related to integration and education over the years. A number of authors have theorized on how immigrants and refugees integrate into society, while others have explored refugees and immigrants in the context of schooling.

Refugee Integration and Schooling

The issue of refugee and immigrant integration has long been debated by politicians, policy makers and the general public. A number of academic studies have also examined integration related to immigrants and refugees.

In his work on immigrant assimilation, John Ogbu (1982) postured that there are three distinct categories of immigrants: voluntary, involuntary and a middle category. Voluntary immigrants are recent waves of immigrants who have immigrated to the United States of their own volition, seeking opportunity. These immigrants, argue Ogbu, are likely to assimilate into the dominant society, as they seek success and opportunities for upward mobility. This influences where they may seek to live, what jobs are desirable and shapes their views of education. As such, children of voluntary immigrants tend to have high rates of academic achievement, as they strive to succeed in school.

Conversely, involuntary immigrants are communities that came to United States by force, such as African Americans, the descendants of African slaves. According to Ogbu, involuntary immigrants often assimilate in opposition to the larger society. This can be observed in many ways, of which schooling is one. According to Ogbu, involuntary immigrant children do not view academic success as something to be desired. As a result, children of involuntary immigrants experience lower academic achievement and downward mobility.

Refugees, postures Ogbu, possess qualities of both voluntary and involuntary immigrants and thus comprise a third category. As such, refugees may assimilate into either the dominant society or minority communities.

Portes and Zhou (1993) also offered a theory on immigrant assimilation. They argue that there are three immigrant assimilation patterns: upward mobility, ethnic solidarity and oppositional culture. Upward mobility consists of immigrants assimilating into dominant, White society, such as Irish immigrants. Ethnic solidarity is often found in immigrant enclaves, where immigrants maintain a distinct ethnic identity, while still being upwardly mobile. The third pattern of oppositional culture represents immigrant groups that assimilate in to lower class,

often urban groups. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) expanded on this perspective, outlining three factors influencing the adaptation of immigrant youth in American society: 1) the human capital held by the parents of the youth, 2) the societal context into which they migrate, and 3) family composition. These factors work together to enhance or deter the successful assimilation of young immigrants. For refugees, they add, high levels of stress- acculturative stress and post traumatic stress, play a significant role as well. In a later work, Portes et al. (2009) reexamined the assimilation paradigm, and offered additional theoretical frameworks for understanding the lives of young immigrants in the United States. Is segmented assimilation, they investigate, a valid framework, or do other models, such as integration or adaptation, align more fully with the experiences of immigrant youth?

In their work on refugees in the United Kingdom, Ager and Strang (2008) explored several key factors that influenced integration. They identified ten core domains influencing the integration of refugees in the UK, all of which were interconnected. They broke these domains into four categories: markers and means, social connection, facilitators and foundation. Each of these categories was necessary for successful integration. Within the markers and means category falls employment, as well as education and housing. Social connection refers to the ways that refugees connect to the society.

Ager and Strang's research highlighted the importance of schools in the lives of refugees. According to them, schools are an extremely important locus of contact where refugee youth are, in addition to academics, are exposed to cultural norms and systems. They also found that "social bridges" were of utmost importance for refugees as they sought to gain cultural capital. Without these bridges, immigrants were isolated, disconnected from the larger society and didn't have a sense of what the larger community around them was experiencing. They found that there were

varying strengths of the bridges; some refugees experienced brief, surface-level interactions with native British people, while others had more long term, intensive interactions. Both interactions proved positive; however, those who had more intensive interactions ultimately had a better sense of connectedness and more ease in understanding culture and navigating structures.

Ager and Strang's work highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of refugee integration, as well as the challenges that often lead to refugees' lack of cultural capital and upward mobility.

The assimilation of refugee and immigrant youth is closely tied to education, another topic which many scholars have studied. A number of studies focus on the difficulties that refugee youth have in adjusting to school in America (Bankston & Zhou, 2002, Mosselson ,2002, Hart,2009). Issues such as interrupted schooling, histories of trauma, lack of parental engagement and cultural and linguistic differences all present barriers for refugee youth when they enter the United States.

Bankston and Zhou (2002) examined the impact of immigrant status of both children and parents have on the academic experiences, achievement and self-esteem of immigrant youth. Conducting a study comparing white, Asian, black and Latino youth, they found that, overall, immigrant youth tended to have higher academic achievement in relation to the other groups studied. At the same time, however, they had relatively low self-esteem. Bankston and Zhou posture that this is due to the unique role that immigrant parents play in the lives of their children. Immigrant parents, they found, are often very invested in their children's education, and place a great deal of emphasis on academic achievement. This leads to them pressuring their children to do well in school, which results in increased academic achievement and decreased self-esteem.

In her study of young female Bosnian refugees, Mosselson (2002) examined how their identities as refugees impacted both their views of, and experiences with high school education. For these young women, she found, education was vital and acted as both a “raison d’etre” and a coping mechanism. For these youth, who struggled through conflict and the resettlement process, education served as a vehicle for hope and provided them with an opportunity to succeed in the United States. However, Mosselson found that for these young women, who were generally very high achieving in school, educational attainment also served as a “mask of achievement,” masking the very real pain, depression and isolation felt by the young women. Academic achievement was not able to erase the trauma endured throughout the refugee process.

Indeed, a number of studies focus on the continued impact of trauma on refugee youth post-resettlement. Refugee youth often endure a great deal of trauma in their countries of origin and secondary settlement (Jamil et al., 2007, Uguak, 2010, Hart, 2009). This trauma can have severe implications for their adjustment to life and schooling in the United States. Several authors point to the deleterious consequences of trauma in the lives of young refugees, particularly in regard to school.

In his study of children displaced by war, Uget Apayo Uguak (2010) found that exposure to trauma was a significant factor in how they performed in school. He studied 235 children ages 8–14 who were in school, but had previously been displaced by war. Uguak cites “effects of trauma in child victims such as an unstable sense of low self esteem (distortion of self); and the inability to focus on multiple stimuli” (Uguak, 2010). Furthermore, he argues, trauma may be the single largest challenge to academic achievement for refugee youth. He argues that there is a direct link between PTSD and academic performance; the greater the effects of PTSD, the lower the academic achievement of a student. Kia-Keating and Ellis’ (2007) study of Somali refugees

in the USA strongly supports these views. After conducting in depth interviews with 76 teenagers, they found that the largest factors influencing self-efficacy and achievement were “greater exposure to war, violence and displacement” (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007).

For refugee youth, trauma also has an impact on their interpersonal relationships with other. In his study, Hart (2009) found that traumatic history may make it difficult for refugee students to focus, form close relationships, or have a strong sense of achievement. Additionally, young people struggling with the effects of trauma are more likely to be victims of bullying, further exacerbating their troubles (Hart, 2009).

Another key theme that emerges from the literature is the role of culture in the lives of refugees, as it relates to schools. Correa-Velez et al (2010) interviewed a group of refugee adolescents in order to determine what factors influence wellbeing. They found that for many refugees, region of birth and connection to ethnic communities were a strong predictor of overall wellbeing. Even those who had endured significant trauma in the past, community support provided a path to successful integration into schools. Other key factors included family support, social status and peer support. In her study of Iraqi refugees, Nykiel-Herbert (2010) found that culture was a key factor relating to the academic success of these youth. Using ethnographic methods, Nykiel-Herbert demonstrated to that young Iraqi refugees performed markedly better when placed in classrooms where their cultural concerns were taken into account. The students were placed in self-contained classes where they were allowed to determine the seating arrangement. In addition, the teachers used oral traditions and other teaching methods regularly used in Iraq. As a result, many of the students, who were previously struggling academically, were able to make significant progress.

In addition to trauma, refugee youth face challenges related to a lack of interrupted

schooling and lack of adequate education in their home countries and countries of secondary settlement (McBrien, 2005). Lack of parental involvement often presents complications for refugee youth as well, as parents are unable to fully engage in the educational process due to language barriers and lack of understanding of the American school systems (Timm, 1994, Blakely, 1983). Refugee youth often face discrimination, which has a profound impact on academic attainment (A. Stepick & Stepick, 2003, Mosselson, 2009).

Immigrants, Refugees and Higher Education

As refugees transition into higher education, many of these themes reoccur. Several scholars have conducted research on refugees accessing higher education in the United Kingdom and Australia. Gateley (2013) researched the opportunities for young refugees as they access higher education in the United Kingdom, finding that refugee youth often lack the support necessary to navigate the college application process. These youth often had difficulty understanding the complexities of the application process, had trouble paying fees and did not have proper documentation of their educational qualifications from their home countries. These themes are echoed in Hannah's (1999) and Earnest et al.'s (2010) studies of refugee youth and higher education in Australia.

Hannah (1999) conducted a study of adult refugees accessing higher education in Sydney, Australia. Based on a number of interviews, she found that there were a number of factors impeding refugees from completing college and university. Among these factors were finances and lack of understanding of how to navigate structures. For refugees who did enroll in college or university, they often chose their specific school because fellow community members attended a school prior, or because of the physical location of the school or low entrance requirements. She also highlights the lack of refugee-specific college resources in Australia, as

well as the need for college counselors to understand the refugee process or become more culturally competent.

In Earnest et al's (2010) qualitative study of young refugees in Australia, their findings echoed many of the themes highlighted in Hannah's (1999) research. Their research emphasized the lack of support systems for refugee students, who felt that they did not have many individuals or community members who were able to offer much assistance with higher education. Additionally, the individuals interviewed expressed challenges with academics at the university level. Students also felt that they had many more challenges than their peers, as they were learning many things at once (English, culture, etc.) while their peers were solely focused on their studies.

Kanno and Varghese (2010) explored access to college and university for immigrant and refugee students in the United States. They uncovered a number of factors contributing to the difficulty that refugees experience in accessing higher education in the United States. They found that the major obstacles encountered by English language learning students in the United States included linguistic challenges, financial difficulties, and lack of cultural capital. They also noted what they deemed "self censorship," or low self esteem.

The literature on refugee youth and education points to several themes related to assimilation, trauma and support from agencies, communities and parents. However, the research contains a gap as to how these themes align with refugee youth in institutions of higher education in the United States. Additionally, there is very limited research on the lived experiences of refugee youth in higher education in the United States. This thesis proposes to build on the established literature by highlighting the experiences of several refugee youth attending college and university in Chicago, Illinois.

Methodology

For this research, I conducted a small-scale, qualitative study, where I interviewed several refugee youth. Such a study allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the realities of these youth and to capture descriptions with richness and depth.

This study was approved by the Loyola University IRB, Project # 1772. Four refugee youth were interviewed for this study. Each of these youth was resettled in Chicago and is currently enrolled in college or university. The youth were recruited through refugee-serving agencies and were informed of the purpose of the study.

In choosing youth for the study, I focused on youth who had come to Chicago as refugees and had engaged with youth and or after school programs through their resettlement agencies. I also chose youth who attended high school in Chicago and those who had been in Chicago for ten years or less. I attempted to choose youth from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and countries of origin, as to highlight aspects of their experience related to their identity as refugees, and not due to their ethnicity.

Each young person contacted me to set up an interview. They each chose the location of the interview, based on preference. Three of the interviews took place in coffee shops and one took place at a local community based organization. Three of the four youth consented to having the interview recorded; one preferred that I only take notes.

Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour. The format of the interview was semi-structured. I posed questions related to several topics. The first few questions asked about their experiences when they were newly arrived in Chicago. The second series of questions touched upon the assistance that they received while in high school, whether from the resettlement agency, school, or other sources. The next few questions focused on family and

community support. The next questions asked about the youths' experiences in college and university, as well as financial aid.

While the interview questions provided a basis for our discussion, the structure of the interview allowed for expanded discussion. In each interview, I asked follow up questions, as necessary, and each young person shared as they felt inclined to.

In my interviews, I was aware of my position as a researcher, as well as how this positionality could impact the interviews, discussions and comfort of the young people. My professional work, as well as my race, national origin, gender and age could all potentially impact the interactions between the young refugees and me.

As a practitioner in the field of refugee resettlement in Chicago, some of the young people were familiar with me and my work. For all of the youth, this ultimately proved to be beneficial, as I was able to understand some of the refugee experience, if only from a service provider standpoint.

I also found that my identity as a black African woman proved to be a source of connection with two of the youth in the study, the two young women from Africa. In our discussion, I was often able to empathize with much of what they said, as I had often had similar experiences as the child of African immigrants. These shared aspects of our identities allowed us to form a measure of trust, and, as such, I felt that both youth were both very open with me.

Following each interview, I transcribed each interview and for terms related to support, integration and community support. I also coded for terms related to the refugee experience in particular such as resettlement agency, refugee, refugee status and family. I then looked for themes that emerged and grouped the themes into categories.

Background on Refugee Youth in the Study

Poe Le

Poe Le is a 21 year old student at a public university in Chicago. Originally from Burma (or Myanmar), he arrived with his uncle, aunt and cousins in Chicago when he was the in eighth grade. He had spent the majority of his youth in a refugee camp in Thailand and arrived knowing little to no English. He was quite involved with his refugee resettlement agency in elementary and high school, as well as taking part in a variety of programs at his school. He enrolled at university, where his older cousin was attending. He is majoring in community health. In addition to being a student, he works part time at a neighborhood church with youth from his ethnic community.

Naima

Naima is originally from Sudan and arrived in Chicago when she was five years old. She came to Chicago with her mother and older brother. She attended elementary and high school in Chicago, during which time was involved in several different programs through her resettlement agency. She also took part in a number of programs at her high school. Following high school, she enrolled at a large public university in Chicago, which she attended for two years. However, she experienced some academic and financial problems, which led to her dropping out of school. After some time, she enrolled at a community college, where she is currently studying in addition to working in organizing at a local non-profit organization. She plans study public policy in the future.

Eh Poe

Eh Poe is a sophomore in college at a large public university on the north side of Chicago. Originally from Burma/ Myanmar, she arrived with her family after spending time in a refugee

camp in Thailand. They were resettled on the north side of Chicago, where she was enrolled in an elementary school. She then attended high school in the city as well. Following high school, she decided to attend university at the same institution at which her sister had studied. She is currently undecided as to major, but is considering business, as she would like to own a fashion business after finishing college.

Estelle

Estelle is in her last year at a large public university in central Illinois. She came to Chicago as a refugee, along with her family. She is originally from the Republic of Congo. When she arrived, she was in elementary school and attended a public school on the north side of Chicago. She attended a charter school for the latter part of elementary school and high school. Estelle was very involved at her school and took part in several extracurricular activities. She was one of the top students in her class and received a full scholarship to the school where she is currently studying chemistry.

Themes

A number of prominent themes emerged from the research that echo themes from the literature. Each of the youth spent significant time speaking about support that they received while in high school, while navigating the college application process, and while in college. Additionally, each young person spoke about the role of their family and community in schooling. They also all discussed the significant role of their resettlement agencies in their lives when they were relatively newly arrived.

All of the young people also spoke about the challenges that they encountered while in college and university. For each young person, the transition to higher education presented multiple difficulties, many of them unanticipated.

Support from Resettlement Agency

All of the youth interviewed received significant support from their resettlement agencies while in Elementary and High School. They all took part in academic assistance programs, as well as after school and summer programs. For each of the youth, these programs were a source of both much-needed academic assistance, while also providing community and valuable life skills. Estelle shared her sentiments about the community at her resettlement agency.

“I was in a community of refugees at [my agency]. It was a good way to be involved after school” (Estelle).

Poe Le expressed similar feelings about the after school program that he attended:

I got to meet other refugees from different cultures. And the volunteers, the people helping with the homework were very, very helpful. Very, very friendly. They made me feel comfortable and they made me welcome in this country. I get to improve my English, too. And to build relationships and to experience different cultures and different people who have the same background as you when you came to the United States. (Poe Le)

Each young person highlighted the academic value that resettlement agency after school programs held for them. The programs that they took part in included tutoring, often one on one. For students new to the American school system as well as the English language, this component was extremely useful. However, each young person stressed the importance of the social aspect of the after school programming as well. Communing with other refugee youth, who were experiencing similar challenges was an important source of support and community. The young people were able to feel safe and “be themselves” at programming. As Eh Poe stated, “I feel more comfortable, cause they’re like the same as me. So I feel like I fit in that space. That made me more comfortable. And I can be myself.”

For Estelle and Naima, the after school programs run by their resettlement agency was

also a source of empowerment, as they gained leadership skills. They both took part in a leadership development program through their agency, which both credit with influencing their decisions and paths later in life. According to Naima, “I was more so getting a lot more from, I think the leadership aspect of it because we got to challenge ourselves more and we had an opportunity to take more initiative around our community and also talk about certain things that we didn’t have an outlet to talk about when we were at home.” Estelle also credits the leadership program with equipping her with skills that she used in college to start her own student group. “I created a service club [in college]. We are located near a food desert, a poor area. We go to high schools and od homework help. It’s just like Youth Leadership Network.”

Although the youth themselves received a great amount of academic and social support through their resettlement agencies, all of them indicated that their parents/guardians did not get a great deal of support from the resettlement agencies in regard to their schooling. They all felt that while they came to understand how to navigate the school system, their parents were not equipped to do so. In fact, Naima stated that she wished that resettlement agencies provided more ongoing assistance with English language learning and education to adults. When speaking about supports she wished her resettlement agency provided, she offered:

Also, for parents. Equipping parents with maybe like a mini workshop of what you should do when you have a kid in college. Cause I think that would help parents too that are like. I think my mom didn’t start taking English as a second language course—at least trying to excel on her levels of reading and speaking—until I was well into my college years. I mean she took just the basics when she first got here, but the community college that’s in the area provides those programs. So maybe encouraging refugee parents to continue so that they can be able to help or at least speak to their kids a little more about it. (Naima)

Variety of Support for College Preparation and Readiness

While all of the youth received significant support from their resettlement agencies in

high school, none of them attended college preparation programs through the resettlement agency. They accessed other sources of assistance in preparing for higher education, such as college preparation programs through their schools.

Among the youth, there were many different sources of support as they prepared for college and university. Several of the youth took part in college preparation programs through their schools. None of the young people indicated that they received assistance from their resettlement agencies in regard to college.

Both Poe Le and Naima took part in college preparation programs through their schools. Naima was part of a program called AVID that took place during the school day and focused on college readiness. According to Naima, only a small percentage of students at her school were selected for this program, based on previous academic performance. She was one of the few selected and feels that it was helpful in helping her navigate the college application process, as well as gain skills that would later be useful in college.

We had to do ACT prep. I don't remember... it was like a certain period within the semester when we were required to do ACT prep. Yeah, so like, I think they had an instructor from DePaul. And we would just take tests and stuff. I guess when I was in high school I didn't think of it too much. But I do feel like it was helpful in getting my mind college-oriented. There was a lot of things that were required of us as AVID students. They made us do binder checks, which was frustrating, but we got used to it. And then they made us... so we had to take notes in our classes. We were required to take Cornell notes and all that stuff. So I guess afterwards, they pushed us to go to four year universities right away. They didn't always really give options and then... we were required to apply to at least 5 universities. So, that's kind of how it went. And if we didn't... It was pretty much a graduation requirement kind of for an AVID student. (Naima)

Poe Le also took part in a college preparation program at his high school, although his was an afterschool program that was voluntary. He took the initiative to sign up for the program, which he attended on a weekly basis. He credits the program with providing him assistance

crucial to navigating the college application process.

There was another program that I got involved in in high school... Education Talent Search. Very easy... you sign up and then they have students to help you. Every Saturday they take students to different places—colleges. They help students to apply for scholarships for college. You get to travel—free everything. I was very, very happy, you know? It was very beneficial for me. (Poe Le)

Estelle also took part in a college preparation program through her school, which she found of assistance in navigating the college application process. However, she did not feel like the program prepared her to excel in college.

“It [the college prep program] helped me with the application process. High school didn’t prepare me for college. I took AP Chemistry, but I almost failed chemistry when I arrived at college. It helped me get into college, but not for college... The focus was to get into college, but not on what happened once you got there” (Estelle).

Limited Assistance from Family Members

For these refugee youth, receiving assistance from family members to navigate the college application process was quite difficult. Although all of the youth have family members who have attended college in the United States, none of the youth relied on these family members as a primary source of information or guidance related to the college application process, or while in college.

Naima had an older brother who attended university while she was in high school. However, she did not reach out to him for guidance on how to prepare for college, as she felt he was already struggling with his own adaptation to college and balancing school and life. Naima stated:

My brother had went to college, so I guess I had that understanding and I started ... cause he’s like four years older than I am and at the time he was going through financial issues,

so I guess that kind of became a little bit of my fear. So when I was applying for colleges, because I was so stuck on going to a four year universities, I was just going towards public universities I thought I could commute to, which is why I ended up going to UIC. I just watched him. No [he didn't offer advice]. I mean, I guess the understanding of college I got from him wasn't necessarily as if it was a positive thing. I seen him going through a lot, which I ended up seeing and being the reality. I seen him going through a lot. And his anxiety was going up. He never really talked about it to us as much. I seen him partying a lot more and then also he went to a party school and he was living in the dorms. So there wasn't really much supervision that we could do. There wasn't much interaction between me and him aside from when he would come home and even then it wasn't long periods of time. He probably dropped out his junior year, so he was still, those three years, he was kinda like... I didn't see him that often. I think he wanted to talk about other things, so we didn't really like... (Naima)

However, Naima did have two cousins a few years older than she with whom she discussed college, particularly once she started school. She was able to lean on these cousins as sources of support, as they had previously encountered many of the challenges facing Naima. Although they did not offer much direct assistance with academics, financial aid or planning, they were able to provide emotional support.

I got support from my older cousin, maybe because... Yeah, one of my cousins went to [a certain] university and my other cousin was at [another one]. I guess, when those questions came up or when I was hitting a stone wall in college that's when I would ask, "How are things for you?" It wasn't necessarily me asking for advice, but it was kinda like me wanting some type of affirmation that it wasn't just me going through it. (Naima)

Eh Poe echoed similar sentiments when speaking about her older sister, who attended university while Eh Poe was in high school. While Eh Poe indicated that she spoke to her sister about college in general terms, she did not go to her for more detailed guidance. According to Eh Poe, her sister was extremely busy with school and was also working, and Eh Poe felt like she didn't have time to answer Eh Poe's questions about college, the application process or financial aid.

For Estelle, who had two siblings who attended college before her, family was not a

source of significant assistance as she prepared to go to college. Like Naima, she learned by watching her siblings navigate higher education, but did not reach out to them for much, if any, direct assistance. She also noted that they did not offer their guidance or opinions with her.

Poe Le was the only young person who did not have an immediate family member who attended college or university in the United States before him. He did, however, have an older cousin who served as inspiration for him, and gave him some guidance on the school that he ultimately chose to attend, largely based on her input.

“I asked her about [university] and she told me it’s a really good school; that they have a good education program. Other than that, I’m not sure” (Poe Le).

Although each student did not receive a great deal of direct guidance from family members, they all indicated that having close family members pursuing higher education was a source of inspiration for them. Additionally, each one watched their family member closely and took away lessons from the ways they navigated higher education.

Role of Parents and Guardians

All of the youth interviewed indicated that while their parents or guardians were supportive of them going to college and furthering their education. Indeed, several of the young people indicated that their education was one of their parents’ primary motivators for resettling in the United States. However, as previously noted, the young refugees felt that their parents did not have a strong understanding of the school system, including higher education, in the United States and were thus able to offer limited tangible assistance.

Estelle noted that, although her parents were highly educated in their home country, they were not able to help her, as the educational system is so different in the United States.

“I didn’t get advice from anyone. The education system is different than my parents’

back home. My sister didn't talk about school and my brother was in school. I wish I would've talked to somebody" (Estelle).

Naima spoke about her desire to have a parent who had a better understanding, but noted that, largely due to the fact that she came as a refugee, her mother was not able to.

That would have been helpful, in terms, like if I had a parent who was more ... I guess had more of an understanding of the college process because obviously coming here as a refugee they don't necessarily groom parents to be like "Okay, well when your child is transitioning to college these are gonna be the next steps, and these are going to be the questions that you need to vet them through and these are going to be the things you're going to need to prep them for." (Naima)

Additionally, many of the youth expressed that, even though their parents wanted them to succeed in school, they had many additional concerns that prevented them from devoted much time and effort to doing so. Financial concerns, long work hours and other children all occupied the attention of the parents and guardians of the youth. Additionally, all of the young people have other (generally younger) siblings that also required assistance from their parents and guardians.

Poe Le indicated that his aunt and uncle, though they were generally in agreement with his decision to pursue higher education, had not expressed strong support. In fact, he shared that he often felt that, due to his studies, his guardians felt that he was not able to contribute financially as much as desired. He stated:

They don't really care... They care, but... I feel more motivated myself. You know, I'm not blaming anybody, but sometimes at least I want my family to understand—getting an education, going to school is not easy. I want them to—sometimes even though, you know I don't ask for much. I ask for motivating words, positive words, successful words, loving, caring... I understand they're already caring for me, they're already loving me, they're already doing everything that they could to support the family. But I feel sometimes I want them to understand I'm different. I want them to support me for whatever I do. And I know they might be already proud, but sometimes they should express... Sometimes it's very difficult, especially the financial, you have to deal with the family too. "You only go to school." Sometimes it's very hurtful too. I go to school, but I'm not sit down there and just get good grades. I have to work too; it's like a job. In order to get something to add to earning. I have to work for it. I want them to understand

that too. I think if they understand the feeling or the struggle in college—being in school— that would be much better. (Poe Le)

While parents and guardians may wish for their children to pursue higher education and be academically successful, their own limited knowledge and lack of connection to resources is a hindrance in helping them assist their youth.

Role of the Ethnic Community

I asked each of the young people about the role of their ethnic community in their lives, particularly in regard to schooling and higher education, as well as their perceived role within the community.

Naima spoke a great deal about the Sudanese community's impression of schooling, as well as the level of support that they provided her. According to her, the Sudanese community feels that pursuing higher education is desirable, and individuals encourage young people to pursue schooling. However, the community, overall, is not able to offer much tangible assistance. She shared:

So, similar to my mom, I felt like the Sudanese community in general, all they care about is that you were going to college. So if you say, "Yeah I'm applying," they don't follow up with it. And when you say, "Yeah, I've gotten through everything, did everything," They don't follow up with "Okay, did you get your applications in? Are there scholarships?" It wasn't about those specifics. It just like, "She's in college, Great."
(Naima)

Estelle did not speak very much about the role of the Congolese community in schooling.

Poe Le offered limited thoughts about the role of the Burmese/Karen community in his life. He spoke about the support that he received from his older cousin, who was one of the first in the community to attend university. Outside of this, he was not able to recall much direct impact that the community had on his schooling. He did, however, spend a significant amount of time speaking about his role in the community, in terms of encouraging those younger than him

to pursue higher education.

In his role as a Youth Assistant at his church, Poe Le works with Karen youth in junior high and high school, helping them understand systems and linking them to resources. He also tries to serve as a role model and to encourage those younger than him to pursue education. According to him, many of the younger Karen do not show much interest in pursuing higher education, and are opting to join the workforce right out of high school, which Poe Le finds frustrating. He shared:

They don't really think about college. That's the sad part. They're not really motivated to go to college. I think it depends on their interest... maybe their view of the world is different from me. Maybe their experience is different. Most of the time I think they probably grow up in the refugee camp. Cause people they experience the war, too. Most of the time many of them just born in the refugee camp; they don't really understand that their life can be beneficial. Especially if you finish school, you can help your community, maybe someday you could go back there and help there; to offer your life. I'm not sure if they see that. The sad part is they say, "No, I want to work. I'm gonna get a job." They say "I'm tired of school, I'm tired of everything." Sometimes it's not their fault, it's their family too. Sometimes, their families... they need to work. Only one person is working. If two or three people can work it's much better. Especially with the rent in Chicago.
(Poe Le)

Eh Poe spoke about how few students from her ethnic community attended her university which led to them not being able to support one another very well. When asked about the presence of Karen students at her school, she stated, "I would say... six. Only six of us, but we don't have class together, so it's hard. When we see each other, we do talk about it [college]"
(Eh Poe).

Eh Poe went on to speak about her role in the community, when it came to providing assistance to younger Karen students, particularly those in high school who were contemplating higher education.

"One of the Karen high school students ask me about college, like 'Is it hard?' and I tell

them it's hard, but they can do it" (Eh Poe).

Reliance on Other Refugee and Immigrant College Students

Almost all of the youth interviewed indicated that a source of significant support for them while in college is other refugee, immigrant and international students. Each young person was able to create a support system with other immigrants and refugees at their places of study. It is worth noting, however, that in all cases these other students were not from the same countries or ethnic groups as the youth themselves.

For each person, other refugee and immigrant students formed an informal network of support. In these networks, students informed each other of resources on campus. These networks also served as study partners, and in some cases, taught valuable study skills. Both Estelle and Eh Poe noted that, through other students, they truly learned how to study.

"I learned from friends. I became friends with international students who were used to studying. I went to group study sessions. Now I study two weeks in advance" (Estelle).

Eh Poe spoke about some of the academic challenges that she had during her freshman year and how her friends, mostly immigrants and refugees, helped her to overcome those challenges. Through these friendships, she was able to gain comprehension of spoken lectures, learned about valuable campus resources and even got connected to employment.

It's very difficult, because most of the people don't have to worry about taking notes. Cause every time they're talking, you have to write very fast and they know all the spell words. And it was very hard for me cause some of the words were hard to understand... very difficult. I got to know friends...so it's like, "Can I see what you wrote?" ... I went to the library, and I went upstairs and went to the tutors. My friend told me about them, cause she worked there. That's also how I got my job there too. (Eh Poe)

Refugee and immigrant students were also an important source of friendship and emotional support. Much like the other youth in their after school programs, these students had

similar shared experiences, and also often felt disconnected from the larger campus community.

“I instantly started connecting with the African community. Africans that were also commuters... we were kind of always just tell each other just like piggybacking off of each other. Just telling each other about what resources the school provided” (Naima).

Concerns about Financial Aid

For most of the youth, one of the major concerns that arose when they began to contemplate higher education was the cost. Each of the young people indicated that they knew very little about financial aid, loans or scholarships while in high school, and several of them indicated that they still had very limited knowledge of these topics during their first years of college.

Even though most of the youth took part in college preparation programs while in high school, all of them felt that these programs offered little assistance in helping them understand how to the costs associated with higher education as well as how to finance. Many of them stated that they wished that they had a better understanding of financial aid while making decisions about where to go to college, as they feel they may have chosen differently. Additionally, several of the young people said that they did not understand much about scholarships or loans.

Estelle and Naima noted that, through their schools, they felt a great deal of pressure to go to a four year college or university, as these were considered to be more prestigious. However, they were not fully aware of the cost differential between four year schools and community colleges. Both of them expressed that, in hindsight, they wish that they would have pursued community college first due to the lower cost.

“One thing I wish I would’ve known is that it’s okay to start out at community college. And there’s nothing wrong with it. Also, I wish I knew about like... We were offered like

financial aid suggestions, kind of [in AVID], but it wasn't anything specific to, like who you are, you know? So I think, like maybe a little later on I ended up looking into some, but the deadlines had already passed... little scholarships that would go a long way" (Naima).

Challenges While Pursuing Higher Education

These young refugees encountered a number of challenges while in college and university, in addition to the ones listed above. Each of the young people indicated increased anxiety and emotional distress and isolation while pursuing higher education. Naima and Estelle both had significant anxiety while in college.

Naima dealt with severe anxiety and depression during her first year of college, which led to poor academic performance, and eventually, her dropping out of school for some time. When asked what one of her largest challenges was in her first year of college, she shared,

I think, dealing with anxiety and depression and not really understanding what that meant or why it was happening or how I could deal with it. I remember there was this one time I was supposed to take a midterm or something like that, I forget what it was. I just had a long week and then all of sudden I walk in and they were like "You have a midterm." that I hadn't even really prepared for as much and all that. And I kinda was trying to sit there but I had an anxiety attack on the spot and I ended up just leaving and coping with it myself and then following up with my professor saying "oh yeah, I just... I couldn't attend" or something like that. Cause it was like a big lecture, so it wasn't necessarily like they were paying attention. It wasn't like "Are you okay?" (Naima)

Estelle also expressed that she experienced mental health challenges while in university. She shared that the difficulty of navigating college on her own was intense, and led to anxiety. She shared, "In high school, everything is set up for you. In college, you choose for yourself. Not having somebody holding your hand was a shock. You only have four years and you are making your own decisions. It's hard. As a junior, I was too stressed out and couldn't sleep" (Estelle).

Eh Poe shared that one of the most significant challenges she faced while a freshman was isolation and a lack of opportunity to make friends. Because of her accent, she was shy and

hesitant to reach out, and found it difficult to meet people. She shared:

There were a lot of challenges, because you have classes and it's expensive. It's hard because in high school, you get to sit in groups, but in college, you sit by yourself. So you don't really get to know people. It's hard to make friends... Freshman year, I don't know anything at all. Because my English was very... it was still very hard. I was afraid to talk.... I was the only one [Burmese / Karen] in my classes. (Eh Poe)

In addition to the issues above, each of the young people struggled with the academic rigor of higher education. All of the young people struggled significantly with the workload, expectations of professors and the difficulty of classes. Many of the youth indicated that they felt that their high school educations did not adequately prepare them to succeed in college.

“I felt like I wasn't prepared. I didn't know how to study. I didn't have guidance and I had to learn the hard way. I learned to review material after class” (Estelle).

“I feel like our high school—the quality of our education wasn't totally up to par. I feel that to an extent, yeah. I do think I was a little more prepared than someone who wasn't in IB or AVID, but my math and science skills were slightly lacking, so I wish I did more” (Naima).

Accessing Resources at College and University

Each of the refugee students, while they did not access many resources at their high schools, learned the importance of accessing school resources once in college and did so more consistently. Each of the youth spoke about the importance of understanding what resources exist at the school, knowing how to ask for help, and taking the steps to access these resources.

Poe Le spoke a great deal about how he sought out resources, such as tutors or helpful professors, while in college. When discussing the challenges he encountered his freshman year, he spoke about a professor who was particularly helpful, as well as tutors that provided him with assistance.

“I had a professor who taught American history, he was very nice...I attended

orientation. And that's where people showed me where to go. The good part was the homework. Every time, every time I needed help. I know myself, I always need a resource... During my freshman year, sophomore year [I went to tutors]. A lot. Every week. Cause I was struggling to write. And they were very, very helpful" (Poe Le).

Estelle also spoke about the availability of supports available at her school, which she learned to access after being there some time.

"I have a really great support system. I have a great counselor who tells me who to go to. The support system is there—you just need to go do it. Professors are also friendly" (Estelle).

For Eh Poe, though she was slow to access resources at her school, once she did, she found that college was much easier to navigate. After her freshman year, she learned of resources such as on campus tutors and a college completion program, both of which she found beneficial.

Freshman year, I don't know anything at all. Nothing. Just sit by myself. Because my English was very... it was still very hard. And sometimes when I talk people don't really understand me because of my accent. So it was very difficult. And even though I don't know something, I don't ask questions, cause I was afraid people might not understand... In the end of the semester, I was like, you know what, "I'm just going to talk." After that, I made friends with people and now I'm more active than I used to; not as shy or anything... Freshman year I didn't know much, but sophomore year, I started going to the tutor... ... Freshman year I didn't know about TRIO program. It's like... it helps you go through freshman year in high school to senior year. It's kinda like a counselor, but in college TRIO is like totally different from your advisor. It helps you with many stuff, like will send you the link of scholarships and the activities that they have in TRIO. (Eh Poe)

Conclusions

For refugee youth in the United States, a number of factors contribute to their experiences, and ultimately, their success in college and university. However, they face many significant challenges in accessing higher education. In addition to the challenge of adapting to a new environment and increased academic rigor, they face challenges tied to their status as

refugees. Lack of established communities, limited support from resettlement agencies and a sense of isolation were obstacles that they faced as young refugees.

The refugee youth taking part in this study did, indeed, have a number of shared experiences, many of which echoed themes raised by existing literature.

Parental, Family and Community Support

Themes related to support were among the most significant of the shared experiences of the young refugee students. Support for the refugee youth in this study came from a variety of loci: family members, community, resettlement agencies and fellow students. For all of the youth, parents, family and community were motivating factors, even though they were not able to provide much tangible assistance in navigating structures. All of the youth indicated that their parents were generally supportive of them pursuing higher education, and that their parents tried to be encouraging. However, the youth also indicated that, despite this, parents knew very little about the educational system and processes and lacked the cultural capital necessary to be of much assistance. Parents often had significantly less English, fewer connections to the larger American community, and less knowledge of academic resources. For the youth, this often led to frustration, as well as a sense of role reversal, which is consistent with themes from research by Mosselson (2002) and Timm (1994). Youth also felt that, many times, their parents were unable to provide them with the much-needed emotional support to weather college stresses.

Other family members also had a significant impact on the young people's decisions around higher education, as well as their experiences with it, although often due to direct influence. While each student spoke of family members attending college, most of the youth relayed that these family members did not engage in much direct conversation about the topic. In most cases, family members attending college offered a few brief suggestions.

However, each young person shared that they observed how their family members were doing in college and university, the choices that they made, and the struggles that they had. These observations, in turn, influenced where the youth went to school, what kinds of programs they took part in and what their expectations were upon entering college. In addition, the limited conversations that they did have with their family members had great impact. For example, when I asked both Poe Le and Eh Poe how they chose their colleges, they both stated that they had a family member who attended the same school.

The focus on support also mirrors many of the themes raised by Portes and Rumbaut (2001), particularly related to three areas of focus: parental engagement, family composition and community context. Indeed, for the youth in this study, these three factors had significant impact on their experiences, due to the amount and types of support they were able to offer. Parents, as noted above, were often unable to engage fully with academic systems, further disadvantaging the youth. The family, which is often a locus of support in many refugee communities, was also unable to provide adequate support. The larger community often proved lacking in support for these young people.

Isolation, Stress and Anxiety

For all of the young people, attending college proved to be an isolating experience, as they were among the very few in their ethnic communities pursuing higher education. As they worked toward social mobility, they often found that the structures with which they interacted were pulling them further away from their communities and families. Each young person spoke about feeling like others in their community, including their immediate family members, were not able to relate to them, because they did not understand what it was like to attend college or university in the United States. This was particularly true in regard to parents and guardians. All

of the youth felt that their parents did not understand the difficulty and stressors associated with being a higher education student in this country.

Consistent with Mosselson's (2002) research, these youth shared that they also struggled with anxiety, depression and loneliness, but that they did not share this with others in their communities, or even their parents.

Loss of Support from Resettlement Agencies

All of the students were very connected to the refugee resettlement agencies while in elementary and high school, however, they all noted that they did not receive much, if any assistance in regard to college preparation or while in college. Many of the youth expressed that they could have benefitted from some sort of programming geared toward young refugees enrolled in college.

Tutoring, enrichment and other youth programming provided by resettlement agencies equipped young refugees for school and their new communities by contextualizing the school experience, giving ongoing, often one on one academic assistance and providing a community where young refugees' life experiences and identities were validated. Such a space would be a great value to refugee youth transitioning to higher education, where they must learn about new structures and methods of interaction. Additionally, such programming may be of assistance in combatting some of the feelings of isolation that refugee youth experienced and would serve to normalize their experiences.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for policy, as well as for practice for resettlement agencies, colleges and universities and other practitioners. From a policy perspective, it would benefit policy makers and refugee practitioners to broaden the scope

of refugee integration. Currently, much of the refugee resettlement integration framework focuses on immediate employment and English language acquisition. However, there is little focus on long-term integration, including higher education. As refugees continue to enter the nation, and more refugee youth seek higher education opportunities, it is increasingly important for the resettlement community to turn its view to programs and funding to support such efforts.

For practitioners, there are also implications. Given the themes of insufficient support, it is evident that refugee youth could benefit from additional supports from resettlement agencies, community-based organizations and institutions of higher education. As refugee youth often lack adequate support from their immediate ethnic communities, these other institutions could provide vital supports for youth once enrolled in college and university. While the youth interviewed where able to access supports in order to get into college or university, they were not able to access such supports as easily once enrolled. This presents an opportunity for resettlement providers to think about new program models to support refugees through their college experiences. Drawing on successes from programs such as Posse, which provides in-school supports for first generation college students, providers could develop programs to help young refugees move toward completion.

Practitioners could also benefit from focusing on imbuing refugee parents with knowledge about schooling, in particular about higher education and how they can support their youth. Also, given the isolation experience by youth, thinking about community, as opposed to individual models, for education about higher education and schooling may be beneficial.

Suggestions for Further Research

While this study provided much in-depth description of the experiences of several young refugees, it also illuminates the need for further research in this area. The study did not assess the

needs or experiences of the larger refugee community (resettlement agencies, ethnic communities, community-based organizations, families) with higher education. A broader, more comprehensive study could examine this area of inquiry from a different perspective.

The isolation experienced by the youth in this study also points to opportunities for future research. As youth pursue higher education, they find themselves moving away from their families and communities. If this trend is to continue, what is to become of refugee communities? Will we see a bifurcated model of mobility with future generations? Or does this lead to a new understanding of refugee integration?

Additionally, there is a lack of quantitative studies on the numbers of refugee youth engaged in higher education, as well as attainment rates. Such a study could also highlight the current realities, as well as the historical trends related to refugees and higher education.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participants will take part in a semi-structured interview, during which they will respond to a series of eleven questions.

Instructions

Thank you taking part in this interview. I will be asking you a series of ten questions to which you are free to respond. Please do not use your real name during this interview, but choose another name for this interview.

Interview Questions

1. When did you arrive in Chicago? Tell me about your experience when you first arrived here.
2. Did you participate in youth and/or academic assistance programs through your resettlement agency? If so, can you tell about your experiences there?
3. Were you aware of any refugee-specific programs at your high school? If so, did you take part in any of these programs? Did you take part in any college prep programs?
4. Did you receive support or assistance from others in your community? Family members?
5. Do you live on or off campus in college? If off campus, who do you live with?
6. Are you involved in any clubs in college? If so, what clubs? Are there any resources that you take advantage of at your school?
7. What is your major? How/why did you choose this major? What do you plan to do with it in the future?
8. What has been the most difficult thing about transitioning to college?
9. What types of support are available to you in college? Who provides this support?
10. How did you learn about financial aid? Did you apply for or receive any financial aid?
11. What is one thing you wish you knew/ had before going to college?

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Léa Tiénou-Gustafson and I am a student in the Cultural and Educational Policy Studies department at Loyola University of Chicago. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the experiences of refugee youth in college and university. You are being asked to participate because you are a refugee who is attending or has attended college or university in the United States.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will meet with me (the researcher) for a 30 minute–1 hour interview. This interview will take place at a place of your choice and will focus on your experiences in college or university, your high school experiences and support systems. I would like to audio record the interview.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions, please email or contact me at LTienou@luc.edu or (847) 596-0299.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Léa Tiénou-Gustafson

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title: An Exploratory Study of Factors Influencing the Experiences of Refugee Youth in College and University

Researcher: Léa Tiénou-Gustafson

Faculty Sponsor: Noah Sobe, PhD

Introduction:

You are being asked to take part in a research study conducted by Léa Tiénou-Gustafson for a master's thesis under the supervision of Noah Sobe in the department of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies.

You are being asked to participate because you are a refugee who is attending or has attended college or university in the United States.

Please read this carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of refugee youth in higher education.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to take part in an interview with the researcher. The interview will discuss topics related to your experience in college or university, your high school experience and support that you've received. The interview will take about 30 minutes to one hour and will take place at a place of your choice (school, coffee shop, etc). The interview will be audio recorded. If you choose not to be audio recorded, notes will be taken by the principal investigator.

Risks/Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

There are no direct benefits to you, but this study may benefit society by adding to research about refugees and higher education. It may provide information about how to support young refugees in college and university.

Confidentiality:

- Identifying information gathered in this study will be confidential. Names will not be gathered and any identifying information will be kept separate from interview data.
- The audio recordings will be made on a device that will only be used for this study. Only the principal investigator will have access to the recordings. After the thesis is successfully defended, the recordings will be erased.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your current relationship with Léa Tiénou-Gustafson or services received from Chicago Burmese Community Center.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Léa Tiénou-Gustafson at 847.596.0299 or LTienou@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor, Noah Sobe at nsobe@luc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the

Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Are you willing to be audio recorded? Yes No

Signature of Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above, have has an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

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VITA

Léa Tienou-Gustafson was born in Pasadena, California and raised in California, New York, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire and Illinois. She attended Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois for her undergraduate education, where she earned a Bachelors degree in Anthropology and French. While at Wheaton, she also studied abroad at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Prior to studying at Loyola, Léa volunteered with the Peace Corps in Chad, where she taught in English as a foreign language at the high school level. Upon her return to the United States, she began her work with refugees and immigrants, working with these populations in a variety of capacities.

During her time at Loyola, Léa focused her studies on Comparative and International Education. Her research focused on the educational needs of young refugees in Chicago.

Léa currently serves as the Director of Refugee and Immigrant Community Services at Heartland Human Care Services in Chicago, Illinois.