

*The New Racism: Examining
Refugee Youths' Experiences
of Racial Microaggressions in
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada*



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Introduction

- Canada was the third-largest destination country for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) in 2015, preceded only by the United States (the largest destination country) and Australia
- Refugee experiences of racism tend to have significant health and mental health implications
- Presentation will highlight the experiences of racism as faced by 15 young refugees aged 14-25 who have resettled in Hamilton, Ontario

Background

- Hadley and Patil (2009) suggest that resettled refugees “are at a particularly high risk of discrimination because they show many outward signs of their minority status, including dress, skin color, language, neighbourhood of residence, religion, and socioeconomic status”
- Ellis et al. (2008) argue that ongoing stressors such as those brought on by experiencing racism, discrimination, and prejudice can further increase refugee youths’ risk to healthy development and potentially function as traumatic reminders
- Houshmand et al. (2014) contend that microaggression theory may be particularly salient in Canada because of its hidden, coded nature

Background

- Solórzano et al. (2000) suggests that the daily common experiences that characterize racial microaggressions “may have significantly more influence on racial anger, frustration, and self-esteem than traditional overt forms of racism”
- Sue et al. (2007) developed a racial microaggression taxonomy that comprises three types: *microassaults*; *microinsults*, and *microinvalidations*
 - Microassaults refer to verbal or non-verbal acts designed to defame an individual through name calling, avoidant behaviour, or purposeful discriminatory actions

Analysis

- P1 ... In my class some people swear, they say “oh n--ger.” Canadian girls say to Somali girls “n--ger.”
- I: How does that make you feel?
- P1: It made me angry
- P2: The only racism I experienced is when I’m walking at night time and if I pass a white lady and she walks to the other side, it makes me feel uncomfortable because I think I’m not gonna hurt nobody, I’m just walking on the street. They’re probably not racist but it’s how their mind is put on, they probably put all black people in same category.
- I: So when you’re walking down the street and white lady crosses away, how does that make you feel?
- P2: It makes me feel mad a little bit, because if I didn’t even thought of doing something bad, but then if it keeps happening, so you think I’m a menace I’m gonna act like a menace, I’m not saying I’m going to do something bad, I’m not that kind of guy, I’m just saying maybe a different person chooses, who’s not as self-controlled as I am, who’s not as put together as I am, they are probably like, if you treat me like this every day, I’m just going to act like that.

Analysis

- P3: In college, it bothered me that people assumed I was an international student because of the way I look.
- I: Did people treat you badly in high school?
- P3: Because of feeling different I isolated myself. I kept myself away.
- I: Were there any incidences of racism?
- P3: Between students it always becomes like a joke. Some people isolate themselves. In my opinion it can be gender based, females avoid incidences, males get into fights, make it into huge incident.
- I: So did it ever make you feel bad, did it affect you?
- P3: Yes. It did. I think that somehow got me into my mental health problems. It affected my mental health.
- I: Did you seek counseling?
- P3: I had mild depression, resulted from anxiety.

Analysis

- I: Did anybody ever make you feel uncomfortable because of the way you look?
- P4: Yeah
- I: Was it in school or on the street?
- P4: Just on the street
- I: Did they make you feel different?
- P4: Yeah
- I: Do you think it's because you're Muslim?
- P4: Yeah
- I: Did they ever say anything?
- P4: No
- I: It's just looking?
- P4: Yeah
- I: On the street when people were looking at you and making you feel different, how did that make you feel?
- P4: A little bit sad
- I: Do you feel people treat you differently because you're Muslim?
- P5: I think so. Yes. Some people don't like Muslim. I guess I don't want any problem on myself like that.
- I: Did anybody ever say anything to you?
- P5: When I came to Canada and I went to school, I can't speak English, they start fighting with me about bad words, when I speak English now I defend myself.
- I: Did they say anything about the colour of your skin?
- P5: They say oh you're black when I sit on the bench oh I don't wanna sit there because she's black and she came from Africa. I can't say Miss they say this. I just do my work and go home.
- I: How did that make you feel?
- P5: I feel bad, I go home and tell my mum. But she says you always going school, don't think anything wrong, listen to your teacher, so listen to my teacher I play together. I have nice teacher. My brother say it's Ok, don't mind.

Analysis

- P6: It happened at my work place too. At the meeting there were like old people, they hated me a lot, I don't know why, they talked stupid things about me to our manager, they complained about us. I knew little more English than I used to, I used to work at [store name redacted], in the other department these old people they talked about me. All the white boys at work hated us; they didn't want us working there. There were three of us friends and they didn't let us be working together. They put us on different days, different schedules.

Analysis

- P7: Yes. Someone hates you but they don't wanna say it ... they like to keep it to hurt more, so it's inside, a lot of people show you love but a lot of hate. To be honest a lot of people hate me too here. Sometimes people treat you different because you're Muslim, they say "Oh you're Muslim."
- I: So when you got into arguments with people, did they ever say anything to you about being different or Muslim?
- P7: Yeah they say "oh you fucking Muslim"
- I: When you walk into a store do you feel like you're being watched?
- P7: Yes sometimes that happen, when I walk in the owner look, he think I am going to steal or something
- I: How does that make you feel?
- P7: It makes me feel not comfortable, I think why you looking at me if I have money. One time I ask, if you think I'm going to steal, I'll do it in a smart way I'm not going to go in front of you and steal, so don't look at me like that I'm buying stuff I'm not going to steal
- P8: I feel like when I go to the stores, the owners look at me, even though I buy stuff ... they are not personally racist but in certain situations you feel the racism, but no-one walks up in your face and is racist because they are afraid ...Canada is secretly racist. My thing is that racism from a long time ago was different, it was honest racism, someone would say something you would be like whoa, you feel it, but this racism, you never know.

Conclusions

- Refugee youth reported feelings of sadness, hurt, and anger resulting from the actions of white Canadians while others felt ashamed of their identity
 - Especially true for Muslim respondents
- Perhaps one of the most troubling outcomes of this research is the supposed “normalizing” of racism
 - Such approaches are problematic as it may lead to higher degrees of isolation, alienation, segregation, depression, and concomitant stress among refugee youth

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