



Mentoring for First-Generation Immigrant and Refugee Youth

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Newcomer, First-Generation Immigrant, Refugee, Youth, Mentoring

POPULATION GROUP

Newcomer Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Strong, Supportive Friends & Families
Education, Training & Apprenticeships

RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

SOURCE

Government

“Programs may want to spend time working with immigrant children and families to determine their particular needs in their new home on a case-by-case basis and not assume that all immigrant experiences are the same” (p. 20).

1. What is the research about?

This report looks at the experiences of first-generation immigrant and refugee youth (FG-IRY) as they adjust to living in the United States. During this transition, FG-IRY often face difficulties, including trouble with their education, mental health problems, and high stress levels. Many of these youth also live in lower income areas and are exposed to violence; moreover, they face the additional challenge of getting used to a new culture. However, some research also suggests an “immigrant paradox,” where immigrant youth sometimes have better academic and psychosocial outcomes than youth born in the United States. These conflicting ideas show the diversity of FG-IRY, and the need for a variety of services and supports. Mentoring has been shown over and over again to support positive development for FG-IRY in all areas of their lives, including academic and psychosocial wellbeing. Based on this, the researchers of this report were interested in learning more about: (1) how well mentoring works for FG-IRY, (2) how its effectiveness is influenced by the background and characteristics of the youth involved, (3) how the positive outcomes of mentoring are best achieved, and (4) what influences the success and sustainability of existing mentoring programs.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research review took place in the United States.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about first-generation immigrant and refugee youth and their mentors.

4. How was the research done?

This report reviews existing studies about youth mentoring and FG-IRY. The author searched research databases to find existing, relevant studies. From there, each article was analyzed, looking at who was involved, what type of mentoring took place, and any reported outcomes (results) to try to answer each of the four research questions. Highlights from important studies were included, and the author summarized their key findings at the end of each section, which are also briefly summarized below.

5. What are the key findings?

- Overall, this review found that mentoring programs are a useful approach to support FG-IRY with social integration, doing well in school, and getting used to the culture of the new country in which they’ve settled.
- The unique background experiences of FG-IRY, both before leaving their home

country and upon entering a new country, will affect the type of mentoring support that will be most helpful, and should be considered in building a supportive mentoring relationship. This is especially important for refugees fleeing violence in their home countries, and undocumented immigrants, who may have more complex needs.

- Having a shared cultural background between mentor and mentee may also help to build a successful mentoring relationship, alongside doing relationship-building activities, setting clear expectations, and involving mentees and their families in decision making.
- Mentors can serve several purposes in supporting FG-IRY, including acting as a “cultural translator” for mentees and their families in getting used to specific cultural norms. They also can assist with ethnic identity development and helping youth to foster a sense of belonging in their new country.
- Finally, there isn’t a lot of existing research about what strategies are being used and what has been effective in increasing youth engagement in mentoring services. Overall, while there has been some research about mentoring for FG-IRY with promising results, more research is needed to clarify, confirm, and expand on these findings.

6. Why does it matter for youth work?

- When working with FG-IRY, it is important to consider the specific cultural background and needs of youth mentees and their families, including thinking about what mentoring means to them, and cultural norms about relationships with adults outside of family members.
- It is also important to consider who is being selected to mentor FG-IRY, including whether an adult or peer mentor is more appropriate.
- Adults who share a similar background to their mentees may be helpful in giving FG-IRY a break from the frequent role of “culture broker,” in which youth are often responsible for helping their parents with cultural challenges or language barriers.

- In terms of good characteristics, adult mentors who have experience with international and/or cross-cultural work, and have positive attitudes towards immigration policy and immigrants/refugees themselves, are best.
- Peer mentors, especially at school, can make youth feel welcome and help them learn how to succeed in a new environment. This can be in the form of assisting them with social norms, learning language skills and cultural nuances, and acting as an advocate, as needed.
- Overall, if mentors are able to support students in feeling more comfortable at school and achieving academic success, this can boost positive outcomes in all other areas of their life.



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