

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A MIXED-METHODS EXPLORATION:  
REFUGEES' CARING RELATIONSHIPS AS  
A SOURCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL.

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The importance of caring relationships between youth and their teachers, mentors, and tutors, for fostering positive academic and socioemotional outcomes is widely recognized in the literature (e.g. Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hao & Pong, 2008; Wentzel, 2003). However, limited research explores the nature and impact of caring relationships between refugees and their educators. Iraqi refugees make up a growing population in the United States (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2011). Understanding this growing population and identifying interventions that benefit youths' integration into an unfamiliar world is increasingly important.

This research expanded understanding of young Iraqi refugees' notions of caring and the implications of those caring relationships for refugee populations. This study was grounded in a theoretical framework, which integrated caring theory (Noddings, 2001), and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1983; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Data were collected utilizing a multi-method approach. First, qualitative in-depth interviews with Iraqi refugees (ages 14-20) were conducted to examine their caring relationships with educators and the resulting academic and socioemotional benefits. A secondary analysis of a large database from the Children

of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) (Portes & Rumbaut, 2012) was also conducted, including people whose families came to the United States for political reasons. This research explored caring teacher-student relationships and their impact on students' academic outcomes and self-esteem.

Most of the interview respondents revealed that they had caring educators. Respondents perceived these educators as those who cared for them academically and personally. Students felt particularly cared for by educators who recognized their specific needs as refugees; these care-providers were often English as a Second Language (ESOL) teachers. While not all educators were perceived as caring, those who were caring provided resources for youths. Respondents benefited from caring relationships, as they learned about academic and professional programs, accessed assistance with college admittance, and received emotional support. The quantitative portion revealed that students who perceived their teachers to be good, fair, and interested, all indicators of caring, had higher self-esteem and Grade Points Averages (GPAs). Overall, this research fills an important gap in the literature and provides important implications for theory and practice.