



COVID-19
Canada



THE END OF THE WORLD
AS WE KNOW IT?

RESEARCH REPORT N° 4

ASYLUM SEEKERS IN CANADA: DOES THEIR CONTRIBUTION DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS MOTIVATE CANADIANS TO HELP THEM IN RETURN?

THIS RESEARCH REPORT IS INTENDED FOR
POLICY MAKERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

THE PROJECT IS FINANCED BY THE CANADIAN
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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the positive contribution of asylum seekers serving on the frontline of healthcare services. In return, are Canadians more inclined to engage in helping behaviours towards asylum seekers? The goal of this study was to measure the extent to which the way we present asylum seekers' contribution to society has an influence on Canadians' willingness to help them in return. Results suggest that the more asylum seekers are presented as contributing to society, the more Canadians are motivated to engage in helping behaviours towards them.

Definitions of concepts

Concepts	Definitions
Helping behaviours	Behaviours aimed at fulfilling another person or group's need. Helping behaviours are not however part of formal exchanges.
Reciprocity	Helping relations are generally conceptualized as unidirectional (i.e., group X seeking help from group Y). Reciprocity (as opposed to unidirectionality) means that both actors can exert a mutual influence on each other. In intergroup helping behaviours, it implies that the group seeking help also helps the group it seeks help from (i.e., group X both helping and seeking help from group Y). The more the "help seeking" group helps the other, the higher the reciprocity should be, as the other group perceives a greater mutual influence.



Research question

Helping behaviour has proved to be central in promoting social cohesion in Canada and all over the world. Past research has focussed on explaining what motivates people to engage in helping behaviour. For the present research, we aim to understand the notion of reciprocity in helping behavior, that is, the perception that people seeking our help are also helping us by contributing to our well-being. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, an important number of asylum seekers in Canada have played a fundamental role in the healthcare system to protect all Canadians from the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, a number of asylum seekers have worked on the frontline of health services in hospitals and long-term care homes. Did their commitment to the healthcare system encourage the rest of Canadians to return the favour? Specifically, for the present case, this would involve support for an accelerated acquisition of Canadian citizenship for asylum seekers.

Hypotheses






The more asylum seekers are presented as playing an active role in helping Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., higher reciprocity), the more Canadians will be inclined to help them. A corollary to our hypothesis is that the country of origin of the asylum seeker (Chinese, Haitian, Ukrainian) may modify the extent to which Canadians engage in reciprocal helping.

Method

Data were extracted from a larger study (N = 3617), which asked a representative sample of Canadians to complete a detailed questionnaire on many occasions over several months. For more details, please consult the technical report (de la Sablonnière et al., 2020). The present survey experiment was included in the 6th wave of the survey. In the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. In each group, participants read a short vignette about an asylum seeker. The level of reciprocity was manipulated by varying the strength of that asylum seeker's contribution to the healthcare system. In the first group, the vignette described an asylum seeker working in healthcare who had stopped working during the COVID-19 crisis (low reciprocity). In the second group, the vignette described an asylum seeker working in healthcare who worked from home during the COVID-19 crisis (moderate reciprocity). In the third group, the vignette described an asylum seeker who was working in healthcare in a hospital

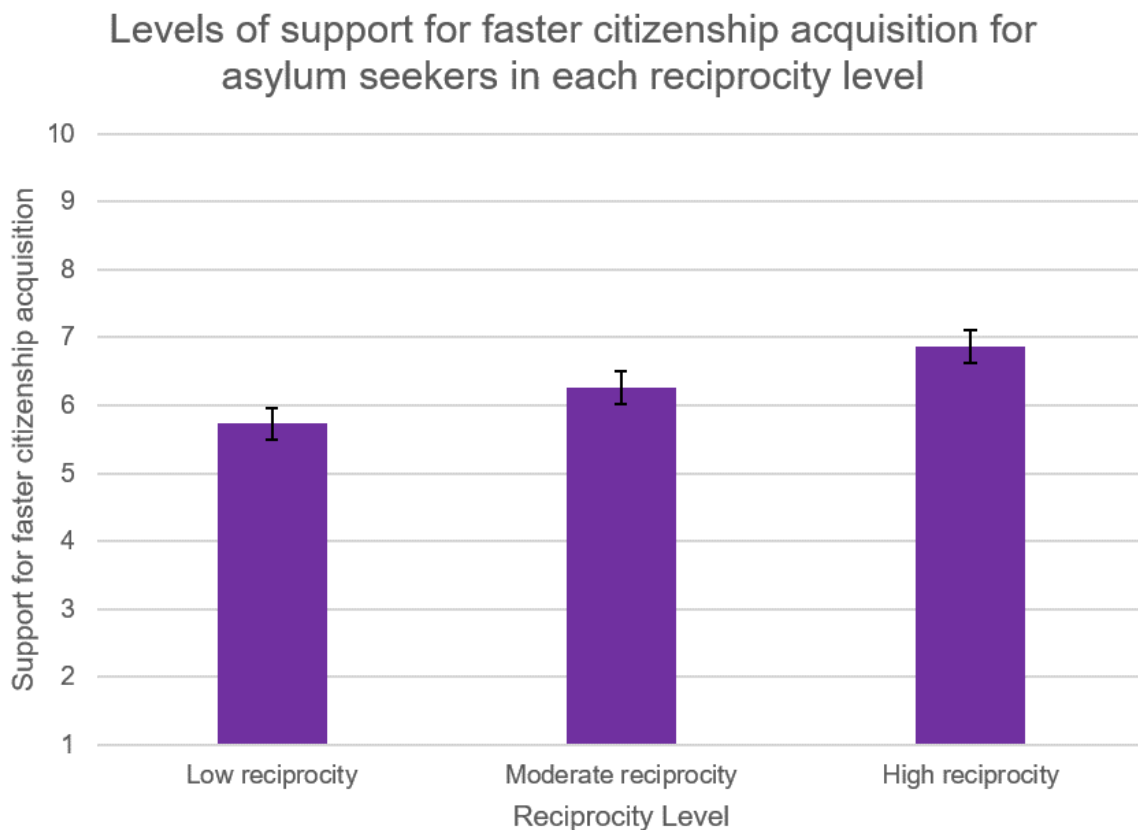


during the COVID-19 crisis (high reciprocity). The country of origin of the asylum seeker was similarly manipulated (the person was either Chinese, Haitian or Ukrainian), creating a 3x3 experimental design with a total of 9 groups. Participants who identified as either Chinese, Haitian or Ukrainian were excluded from the analysis to avoid potential biases. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to answer to a series of questions, including how much they would support the inclusion of the described asylum seeker in a fast-track program to acquire Canadian citizenship on a scale from 1 to 10, which we used as our help behaviour measure.

 Study wave	 Sample Size	 % (n) Women	 Mean age (range)	 Survey Dates
6	1767	50.1% (885)	51.2 (18-92)	15 June - July 11 2020

Results

Our results confirmed the hypothesis; the higher the reciprocity, the higher the help. Participants in the moderate reciprocity group ($M = 6.26$) were significantly more willing to help the asylum seeker than participants in the low reciprocity group ($M = 5.73$), and participants in the high reciprocity group ($M = 6.87$) were significantly more willing help the asylum seeker than participants in each of the two other groups. The country of origin manipulation only yielded small effects. Participants helped marginally less when the asylum seeker was Chinese ($M = 6.04$) than when the asylum seeker was either Haitian ($M = 6.45$) or Ukrainian ($M = 6.38$). Though help towards the Chinese asylum seeker was statistically significantly lower, it is important to underscore that this effect was small and may be significant only because of our large sample size. Therefore, these results should be interpreted with caution. Finally, it is also worth noting that there was no interaction effect between our reciprocity manipulation and our country of origin manipulation, meaning that the reciprocity effect was stable across country of origin groups.



Conclusion

The way in which we depict asylum seekers as helping by contributing to society has an impact on Canadians' propensity to help them in return by supporting the adoption a fast-track program to acquire Canadian citizenship. Specifically, the more asylum seekers are depicted as engaged in reciprocity with Canadians, the more Canadians are willing to help them. The important implication is that highlighting how minority group members contribute to society could foster better relationships between the Canadian population and asylum seekers, thereby facilitating the integration of asylum seekers in Canada. The slightly lower help towards the Chinese asylum seeker may suggest that Canadians may be less prone to help groups that they associate with negative events (as COVID-19 originated in China), even when these groups bear absolutely no responsibility for these events. That hypothesis should, however, be considered with caution, as the effect of the country of origin may only be a product of our large sample size. The absence of an interaction effect between the reciprocity and the country of origin manipulations also suggests that every group would benefit similarly of their contribution being highlighted, independently of their country of origin. Finally, it is also important to acknowledge that our results were obtained in a context of crisis; it is possible that the effect of reciprocity on help was amplified by a certain sense of urgency. However, the fact that the "moderate reciprocity" group's asylum seeker was not directly working on the frontline, but still had more help than the "low reciprocity" group's asylum seeker might suggest that an effect would be found even in a stable context.

Recommendation

To increase social cohesion and social inclusion of many groups government and media should focus on how socially disadvantaged group members are concretely contributing to Canadian society, especially in this time of crisis.

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Director and founder of the Social Change and Identity Laboratory since 2005, Roxane studies the challenges people face when they are exposed to dramatic social change, such as the colonization that affected Canada's Aboriginal peoples or immigration.

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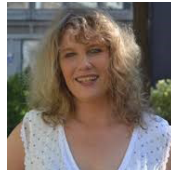
Jean-Marc is the founder and director of the PhysNum laboratory, as well as a researcher at the Center for Advanced Research in Sleep Medicine of the Hôpital du Sacré-Cœur. He studies the dynamics of complex systems including rhythms in social psychology.



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Author of numerous books on social psychology and a specialist in inter-group relations, Don is particularly interested in the plight of disadvantaged populations, such as indigenous communities.

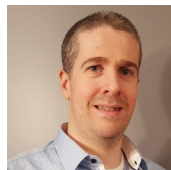
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