

Bernhard, J. K. & Freire, M. (1997). Caring for and teaching the children of refugee families. In K. Murphy Kilbride (Ed.), *Include me too: Human diversity in early childhood* (pp. 177-196). Toronto, Ontario: Harcourt Brace.

### **ABSTRACT**

Desperate families who are often fleeing from life-threatening violence in their homelands arrive in Canada filled with hope. Prior to their unwilling migration, family members may have been persecuted, tortured, raped, imprisoned, kidnapped or killed. The families may have spent long periods of time living underground, in refugee camps, or in transition in countries of temporary asylum. Families have often been separated and the family unit fragmented. They have survived because of their courage and hardiness.

Officially, refugees are distinguished from immigrants. Most immigrants to Canada come voluntarily at the time of their own choosing; a few can be better described as involuntary immigrants. Refugees, like involuntary immigrants, are fleeing dangerous or life-threatening situations, but they have had no time to plan their flight by applying through normal immigration channels. In this chapter we discuss the involuntary immigrants (de facto refugees) together with the official refugees (Convention and Designated Class). Both will be referred to together simply as refugees, for they have many things in common. All flee their countries with a sense of a lack of choice in the matter in response to extreme situations, and involuntarily sever ties with their normal environments.

All newcomers have strengths and survival skills. In this chapter, however, we are concerned with learning the special problems faced by refugee families with children, and with acquiring the knowledge and skills that will make us better able to draw upon these strengths.