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## The Association Between Survivors' Guilt and Gratitude in the Belongingness of First-Generation College Student Refugees

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## Abstract

Refugees often experience a lot of stress and trauma before relocating to their host country (Leo, 2021). Additionally, they often continue to experience different challenges while adapting to their new environment (Leo, 2021). Refugees who relocate may experience survivor's guilt, gratitude to their host country, or may not feel like a member in their new community. On top of new challenges and stressors, refugee students who are the first in their families to attend college feel pressure to excel academically in a way to 'give back' to their family and their host country (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). Although there has been prior research on refugee individuals, there is limited work focused on first generation refugee college students. We aim to recruit first generation college refugee students in the United States from multiple colleges to test our research questions. Aims will be tested with questionnaires provided to the students that assesses survivors' guilt, gratitude, belongingness, obligation, and discrimination. The current abstract will focus on existing literature and the planned study.

## Background

### Survivor's Guilt

- ❖ Is when survivors of tragic events feel responsible for the negative outcomes of the event (death or injury of others), even if the survivor had no power or influence over the event (Wang et al., 2018)
  - This definition is usually used to frame the experience of refugees, immigrants, asylum-seekers, other survivors
- ❖ Clinical literature defines survivor's guilt as excessively worrying about being in a better position than others which effects their overall well-being (Tate et al., 2013)
  - This definition was used to frame the experience of first-generation college students

### Gratitude, Obligation, and Indebtedness

- ❖ Gratitude is related to indebtedness which is often defined as a state of obligation to repay another (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)
- ❖ Different cultural contexts places these factors in different ways
  - Perceptions of parental sacrifice leads to the internalized feeling of indebtedness towards the parents (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)
  - Indebtedness in adolescents promotes filial responsibility with a strong desire for success (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)
  - Emerging immigrant adults feel obligation to their parents as a debt for parental sacrifices endured for their children (Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020)

### Belongingness

- ❖ A basic human need that is vital for maintaining motivation and success in institutions (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021)
- ❖ Higher sense of belonging in college students equals higher academic self-confidence, more academic motivation, improved academic adjustment, and higher achievement (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021)
- ❖ First generation college students reported lower levels of belongingness and experience differences in the effects of sense of belonging (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021)

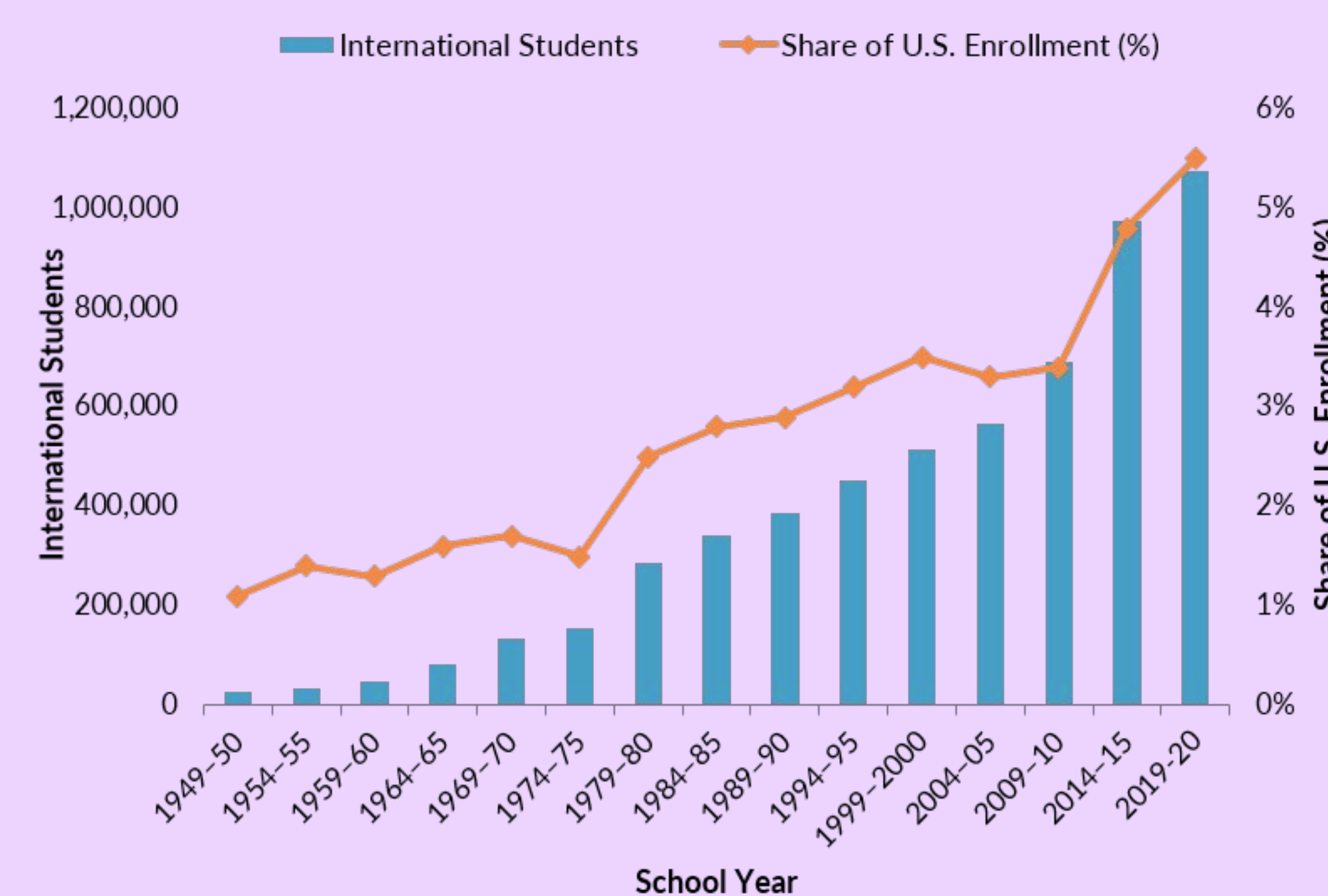
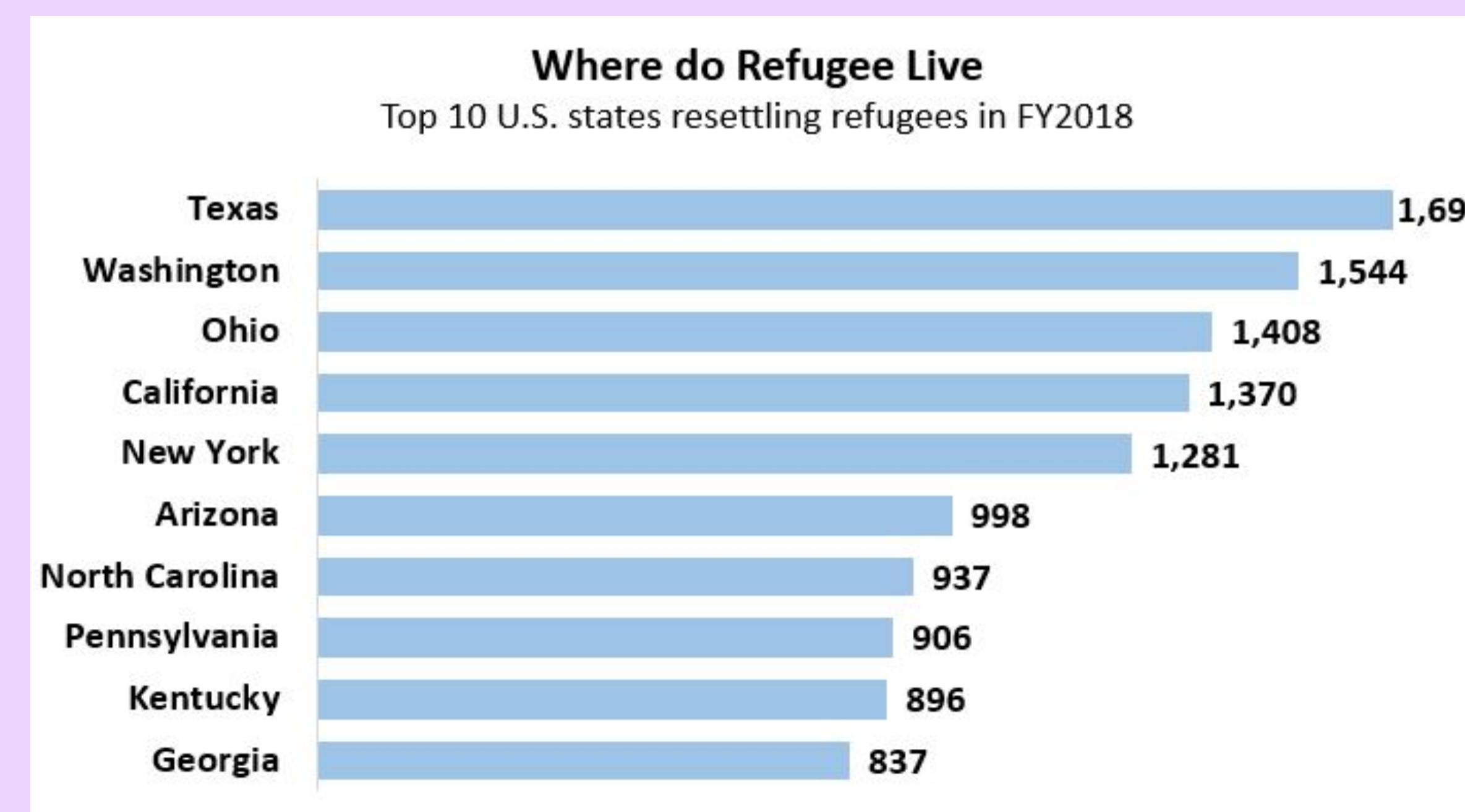
## Research Questions

### Current Study

- ❖ Although there is research on survivor's guilt, gratitude, belongingness on refugees or first-generation college students, there is insufficient research specifically done on refugee students who are the first in their families to attend college. The purpose of this study is to fill in this gap.

### Research Questions

- 1) How does survivors' guilt impact the feeling of belongingness in first generation college student refugees?
- 2) Do first generation college student refugees feel obligated to do well in school due to the feeling of indebtedness to their host country and family or the feeling of gratitude?
- 3) How does gratitude and indebtedness impact the feeling of belongingness in first generation college student refugees?



## Participants & Procedure

### Participants

- ❖ We aim to recruit 150 first generation college refugee students in the United States from multiple colleges to test our questions.
- ❖ We will recruit participants by contacting different universities and colleges as well as refugee organizations.
- ❖ Participants will be put in a raffle to win a gift card for participating.

### Procedure

- ❖ Participants will take questionnaires that assesses survivors' guilt, gratitude, indebtedness, and belongingness.
- ❖ We will analyze data using correlation analyses and multiple linear regression.

## Measures

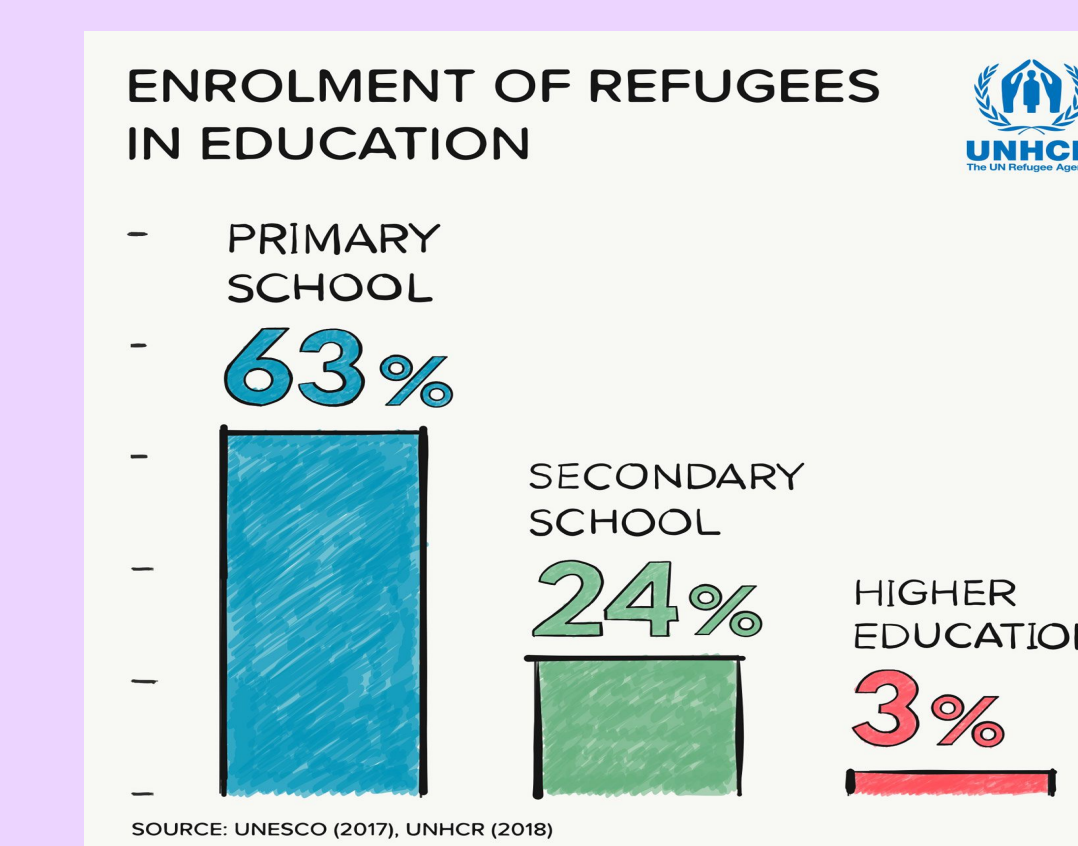
**The Interpersonal Guilt Questionnaire** (O'Conner et al., 1997) is a 67-items scale designed to measure five subcategories of guilt: survivor guilt (22 items), omnipotent guilt (14 items), separation (15 items), and self-hate (16 items). In the current study, we will only use the subcategory of survivor guilty (e.g. "It makes me very uncomfortable to receive better treatment than the people I am with"). Each item is on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

**The Gratitude Questionnaire** (GQ-6) (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002) is a 6-item scale measuring one's proneness to experiencing gratitude in daily life. It is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

**The Indebtedness Scale** (Watkins, Elster, Maleki & McLeod, 2005) is a 22-item scale measuring one's proneness to experiencing indebtedness. It is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Items include "I feel a large debt to my parents for all their hard work contributing to my college finances", "I feel obligated to my parents because of what they have given up to help me to college.", "I feel I am in debt to my parents because of what they have done for me and my education."

**Indebtedness vs. Gratitude** (forced choice for feeling which is dominant, to see if indebtedness or gratitude overshadow one another). The item is: "Do you feel more gratitude or indebtedness in response to what your parent(s) have contributed financially to your college education?"

**Belongingness scale** (Leibowitz et al., 2020) is a 23 item scale measuring campus sense of belonging, academic major sense of belonging, residential community sense of belonging, academic engagement, and self-efficacy. It is rated on a five-point Likert scale, and responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In the current study, we will only use the items measuring campus sense of belonging (5 items) and residential community sense of belonging (5 items).



## Potential Impact & Conclusion

- ❖ There is sparse information that focuses on refugee college students and how survivor's guilt along with gratitude impacts their belongingness in their entire surroundings.
- ❖ Understanding this information will allow for the creation of possible interventions that will improve first-generation college student refugees' feelings of belongingness in their community. Additional research should be conducted to test these interventions.